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AUTHOR	DiMaggio, Paul; And Others
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ABSTRACT

Based on the analysis of 270 studies pertaining to audiences of the performing arts and visitors to museums, this critical review presents a social profile of the culture consuming public and evaluates the quality and usefulness of audience research. The review offers the following information arranged in four chapters: a description of the basic demographics of the arts public and a discussion of other issues involved in audience research such as the composition of audiences over time and their economic and political impact; the quality and impact of arts audience studies; an analysis of the organizational factors affecting research utility, including purpose, impact, quality, and the role of research in arts management; and a proposed agenda for arts audience research. Twelve tables are included and appendixes provide a bibliography along with a list of the studies used in the review. (MAI)

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Research Division Report #9

Audience Studies of the Performing Arts and Museums:

A Critical Review

National Endowment
for the Arts

November 1978

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
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A Study by Paul DiMaggio, Michael Useem and Paula Brown, Center for the Study of Public Policy, November 1977

PREFACE

This Research Report had its origins in a series of meetings organized in 1975 by Polly Buck, the National Endowment for the Arts' program director for the performing arts. The directors of the programs of theatre, dance, and music participated in these meetings with the Research Division staff to outline research needs. The study of the performing arts audience was an area of special concern. The performing arts programs were receiving applications for support of audience studies from institutions in their fields. The program directors recognized that many audience studies had been completed but were unevaluated and could not be used for the greatest advantage. A critical review was thought to be needed before undertaking new audience studies. Subsequently, at the direction of the Arts Endowment's Chairman, Nancy Hanks, the concept for a critical review of audience studies was expanded to include museums as well as the performing arts.

In 1976, a competitive program solicitation was released requesting proposals from individuals or organizations wishing to undertake a critical review of audience studies. The proposals were evaluated and an award made to the Center for the Study of Public Policy in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The project, under the leadership of Michael Useem and Paul DiMaggio, with the assistance of Paula Brown, included a diligent search for audience studies. Initially, it was hoped that 100 to 150 studies would be found. A number of this magnitude would provide an excellent basis for a critical review. However, to everyone's surprise, 270 completed audience studies were found that were made available to the investigators. All but five have now been made available to additional users, as explained in the last paragraph of the Preface.

The critical review examined two kinds of questions. The first is about what past audience studies show when analyzed as a set. The second group of questions was concerned with the methodology of audience studies and the bringing together of the experience so that caveats and guidance for future audience studies might be developed. Both of these sides of the project are presented in this report.

An important caution to the reader: the coverage of institutions is not a result of a structured sampling procedure aimed at providing data on all American arts audiences. Some categories of audiences are poorly represented among the audience studies. We believe that this is an indication that few, if any, audience studies have been made by the institutions serving these audience categories. Also, the study restricted itself to the live performing arts and to museums; it made no attempt to collect audience studies in the media fields. Research Division Report #4, Arts and Cultural Programs on Radio and Television, contains useful information about the audience measurement procedures utilized in the media fields of radio and TV. (Copies of this report are available on request.)

During the study, the investigators met, corresponded, or talked with about 600 individuals who had been involved with one or more audience study projects. In a very real sense, this study report is a distillation of the combined experience of these people. Their contribution to the project was vital and is greatly appreciated by the Arts Endowment. It is hoped that this report will become a benchmark that will allow their experiences to be used effectively by future audience investigators and thereby contribute to both the improvement of the art of studying the audience and to the capability of arts and cultural institutions to serve their audiences.

The investigators collected 270 audience studies. Of these, five were retained as confidential with respect to further examination beyond the project. The remaining 265 audience studies have been brought to the Arts Endowment's offices and are organized as a study collection. These studies are identified in Appendix II. Visitors to the Arts Endowment may make arrangements to examine these studies by contacting Mrs. Chris Morrison, Librarian, National Endowment for the Arts, 2401 E Street N.W., Washington, D.C. 20506, telephone (202) 634-7640.

Research Division
National Endowment for the Arts
October 1978

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SUMMARY 1

INTRODUCTION 6

CHAPTER 1: THE NATURE OF THE ARTS PUBLIC 8

The Studies 10
Basic Demographics 13
  Gender
  Age
  Education
  Occupation
  Income
  Race and Ethnicity
  Summary of Demographics
Additional Issues in Audience Research 34
  The Arts Audience Over Time
  Audience Structure
  Economic and Political Impact

CHAPTER 2: QUALITY AND IMPACT OF ARTS AUDIENCE STUDIES 42

The Arts Audience Survey 42
Predicting Quality in Arts Audience Studies 43
Factors Predicting Research Quality 44
The Correlates of Quality 46
Predicting the Utility of Arts Audience Studies 50

CHAPTER 3: ORGANIZATIONAL FACTORS AFFECTING RESEARCH UTILITY 56

The Purposes of Audience Research 56
  Political factors
  Opportunity
  General concerns
The Impact of Audience Studies 58
  Instrumental applications
  Political applications
The Role of Audience Research Findings in Arts Management 60
Factors Promoting Research Utility 63
  Study attributes
  Personal commitment
  External factors
Factors Preventing Research Utility 66
  Staff turnover and lack of resources
  Hostility and lack of interest
  Research planning
  Communication and follow-through
  Report content
  Study execution
  Technical quality
Conclusion and Recommendations 70

CHAPTER 4: AN AGENDA FOR ARTS AUDIENCE RESEARCH 72

APPENDIX I: BIBLIOGRAPHY 75

APPENDIX II: LIST OF STUDIES 79

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1	Men in Audiences by Art Form	14
Table 2	Age of Audiences by Art Form	17
Table 3	Percentage of Audiences in Five Educational Categories by Art Form	20
Table 4	Occupational Distribution of Audiences	22
Table 5	Occupational Distribution of Audiences by Art Form	24
Table 6	Median Income of Audiences by Art Form	30
Table 7	Time Trends in the Gender, Age, Education, Occupation, and Income Compostion of Performing Arts Audiences	35
Table 8	Deviation from Average Study Quality by Investigator Background, Resources, and Insitutional Setting	47
Table 9	Simple Correlations and Regression Coefficients of Audience Study Quality with Investigator Background, Resources and Institutional Setting	49
Table 10	Deviation from Average Audience Study Internal and External Utility by Investigator Background, Resources, Institutional Setting and Quality	52
Table 11	Frequency of Instrumental and Political Applications of Audience Research Results	59
Table 12	Frequency of Factors Cited Affecting Use of Audience Research Results	64

SUMMARY

Audience research for the performing arts and museums has increased rapidly in recent years to the point where it is now commonplace. We have assembled and analyzed a number of these studies with two purposes in mind. First, we are interested in the social profiles of these groups of attenders. Who is the culture-consuming public? Our answers to this question should be of use to arts administrators, government agencies, other researchers, and the concerned public. Second, we are interested in the quality of audience research. How well done technically is the work? Further, how useful are the results of these surveys and questionnaires to the organizations who undertake them? Ours is the first systematic evaluation of the quality of audience research, and we hope our findings will be helpful not only to other researchers but to those managers and directors who contract for audience studies and who review the results. In the course of both discussions--on audience composition and on research quality--we review and summarize pertinent literature in the field.

There is a need to know who the cultural audience is--and is not--before policy decisions are made on how to expand an organization's activities or on how to be more responsive to a wider range of the public. Our data on the composition of performing arts audiences and museum visitors are based on 270 studies, both published and unpublished, which we list at the end of the report. We gathered this material after a search of libraries, indexes, and bibliographies. A mailed inquiry to over 1,200 cultural institutions and organizations brought more than 600 responses.

Nearly all of the studies we received were done after 1970, although originally we had hoped to include earlier ones as well. These were done for institutions which varied widely in size, function, and location. They do not, however, represent a precise cross section of the cultural activities involved. In the field of the performing arts, the studies were of audiences for theatre, dance, ballet, classical music, and opera. For museums they were of visitors to art, history, science, and other museums. We did not receive audience studies for jazz, folk/ethnic music, popular art, and did not seek studies on any of the media arts of radio, television, and film. The studies came from forty-one states and the District of Columbia. They were not weighted according to audience size, but are what we were able to collect.

For categorical variables (gender, education, occupation, and race) we tabulated percentages of respondents in those categories used in the greatest number of studies. For continuous variables (age and income) we calculated median figures for each audience studied.

Gender. The stereotype of the arts as a predominately feminine activity did not hold true. Women only slightly outnumbered men in relation to their percentage of the population as a whole. The men in the audiences were a median 43 percent for the performing arts, 46 percent for museums, and 49 percent for the population. Audiences for ballet and dance were the most heavily female (60 percent) and visitors to science and history museums were the most heavily male (53 percent), but there were large variations from audience to audience both within and among cultural types. For example, there were more men than women in one-quarter of the studies of the performing arts and in two-fifths of the studies of museums. The median percentage of men ranged from 31 to 58 in the performing arts and from 30 to 71 in museums. In other words, the overall figures on gender would be a poor predictor of the make-up of a particular audience. The day of the week and, perhaps, the content of the event had some effect on the gender of the audience.

Age. The median age of visitors to museums was thirty-one and of audiences for the performing arts was thirty-five. This age profile is similar to that of the general population since the figures lie between the median age of the entire U.S. population (twenty-eight) and the median age of the population sixteen and over (forty). The data from the studies was complicated by a variety of restrictions on the age of respondents.

Again, variability was great within and among the types of performing arts and museums. Audiences for opera and classical music were older than for theatre and ballet/dance. There was less variability among museums but science museums had audiences younger by a median two years than art museums. The seasons of the year and the time of performance in some cases affected audience age. Audiences were younger in the summer; the median age grew older from weekend evenings to weekday evenings to matinees (the oldest). There is some evidence that content of the event and that geographic region affect audience age.

Education. Educational attainment is the single most important variable in the social profile of attenders. Perhaps this is because schooling provides formal training in the arts, a social milieu encouraging participation, opportunities to attend, and a family habit which is passed down to children. Although audiences varied considerably, median educational attainment was consistently high. Among attenders, 30 percent had graduate training, 54 percent had four-year college degrees (as compared to 14 percent of U.S. adults), 22 percent had no schooling beyond high school (74 percent of U.S. adults), and 5 percent had not completed high school (38 percent of U.S. adults).

It is likely that children were under-represented in audience samples although the extent cannot be determined from analysis of the studies.

Median education was higher for performing arts audiences than for museum visitors, higher for ballet and dance than for theatre, and higher for art museums than for science and history museums. Although for education, as for other variables, museums served a somewhat broader public than the performing arts, cultural audiences were closer to each other than to the general public.

Occupation. The complexity of classifying occupations into manageable categories, especially given the vast array of schemes in the studies we analyzed, means again that tendencies are more important than exact figures here. Even with this qualification, however, one of the most striking findings was the very high percentage of professionals among attenders and the very low percentage of blue-collar workers. Professionals made up a median 56 percent of employed persons in the audiences but were only 15 percent of the employed work force; blue-collar workers were 4 percent of employed persons in the audiences but 34 percent of the employed work force. (At that, the percentage of blue-collar may be slightly overstated due to classification ambiguities.)

Again, museum visitors were somewhat more representative of the public than the performing arts audiences. For example, there were 42 percent professionals among museum visitors as compared to 59 percent professionals among performing arts audiences. Art museums differed from other types of museums with a higher ratio of professionals. In fact, they had the same percentage (59) as did the performing arts, which differed little among the various types.

Teachers (including college and university) were especially numerous among professionals with 21.0 percent of the attenders overall but 4.1 percent of the work force. In comparison to their share of the professional work force, they exceeded their share of professionals among attenders by a third.

If professionals were high in all measures, blue-collar workers were low. Only among "other museums", which showed 17 percent blue-collar, was there any change in the pattern. Blue-collar workers were 2.8 percent of performing arts audiences and 3.1 percent of art museum visitors. And excluding museums other than art, thirty-four of the fifty-two studies showed blue-collar workers in numbers amounting to less than one-tenth of their share of the work force as a whole.

Among other occupations, managers had higher percentages in the performing arts audiences than in the work force, though not nearly so high as professionals. Some studies merged professional and manager into one category. When we did so to discover a rough index of high status occupations, we found that 69.5 percent of attenders fell into this combined category which made up 25.5 percent of the work force.

Clerical/sales and homemakers had percentages below their share of the work force but the latter were highly variable from audience to audience (5 to 52 percent). Students were attenders to a very high degree, though again the range was great (0 to 63 percent). Retired and unemployed were consistently low in relation to their share of the population.

Income. High income is associated with cultural participation but is not the cause, at least not nearly to the degree that education and occupation are. When all three factors are controlled, income does not seem to predict attendance where education and occupation do.

Since it is sensitive, private information, income figures are liable to distortion (there were nonresponse rates up to 29 percent). All figures from the studies have been converted into mid-1976 dollars for comparability. In this regard, a median figure for the U.S. as a whole would be a family income of $14,000.

Throughout the studies family income was consistently above this baseline. For the performing arts, the median was $19,000 and for museums $17,000. When audiences for outdoor dramas were excluded, the median income for the performing arts was higher, $20,250. Also, once this group of studies was disregarded there was a good deal of consistency from type to type in the performing arts.

As they did with regard to education and occupation, museums attracted a somewhat more representative cross section of the public in terms of income. But still, only one museum study reported a median family income below the general population.

Race. Very few studies reported attendance by race or ethnic background. Based on this scarce data, we found that minorities--blacks and persons of Hispanic and Oriental background--were 7 percent of the audience but 20 percent of the population. Museums other than art were more inclusive with 11 percent minority attendance. Blacks made up 3.0 percent of the attenders but 12.3 percent of the urban population. Selected comparisons of individual studies with urban area statistics also showed this pattern of underrepresentation.

The low ratios of minorities are probably due to the fact that these groups on the average are younger have less education and lower incomes, and are less likely to work in professional occupations.

A review of cross-sectional surveys in which people reported on their own attendance habits showed wide variation from place to place and time to time, but in general the figures for minority attendance are much higher than in the audience surveys.

In sum, the studies show that the culture-consuming public is more educated, has higher incomes, and has higher status jobs than the general public. Museum visitors were somewhat more representative of the public than performing arts audiences. The difference may be attributed in part to the lower median age of the museum population. Theatre audiences had slightly lower scale demographic profiles than the other performing arts, and art museums were higher scale than the other types of museums.

We could find no evidence that audiences were becoming more democratic. None of the variables showed any significant change in time over the last fifteen years for the performing arts, the only studies for which we had sufficient data. Changes might be going on within or among audiences for individual art forms but the necessary aggregates of our data would conceal these.

In our review of audience studies we also looked at the frequency of attendance, economic impact, and public attitudes toward the arts. We discovered that frequent attenders are more educated and probably have higher incomes than infrequent attenders. Also, frequent attenders of one of the performing arts are likely to go to performances of the other arts (frequent theatregoers are the exception). The few studies which examined economic impact showed that cultural institutions seem to draw visitors to a city and the resultant spending benefits certain segments of the economy substantially. And finally, studies of attitudes toward the arts showed widespread public support with majorities or near majorities in favor of government subsidy. Local money tends to be preferred to federal, funds for institutions are preferred to funds for artists, and museum support is preferred over the performing arts. In general, public attitudes seem to be growing more supportive along with the increase in government funding.

Good audience research is scarce. The best single study of cultural audiences to date has been William J. Baumol and William G. Bowen's work in 1966, Performing Arts--The Economic Dilemma. (Their data showed a more elite audience than ours, probably because they analyzed professional performing arts only.) Apart from this landmark work, quality varies tremendously. One of our main interests has been to measure the factors affecting quality and to relate these to the use to which audience research findings are put. We hope our analysis will provide guidelines--though certainly not hard and fast rules--for those organizations considering audience research.

Detailed questionnaires were sent to 112 directors of studies done since 1970. Of these, 86 responded with the information requested on such factors as the profession, education, and experience of the investigator; organization conducting the research, the project's budget, the research methods employed; and the applications made of the results. These questionnaires along with the study reports themselves were rated according to a checklist of specific research procedures. We measured both internal validity (whether the explanation offered is the true cause) and external validity (whether the results can be generalized) and developed a single quality scale. We used multiple regression analysis to determine the effects of each study characteristic, holding all others constant.

The result was that budget and investigator's profession were of greatest importance in producing quality. For example, a budget of at least $1,000 and a study director with a background in social science, or in a miscellaneous category of other research-related professions, did very well on the quality scale. Budget and profession explained 63 percent of the total variation in quality.

We also developed utility scales to measure the application of research to policy, based on the reports of the study directors. These looked at internal use (e.g., ticket pricing and exhibit content) and external use (e.g., public relations, funding, and audience expansion policy). We found no significant correlation between use, technical quality, and the correlates of quality--budget, investigator profession, and institutional setting. The only factor which had any sort of importance was the interaction of two variables: experienced in-house investigators produced studies that were found to be more useful than those done by either inexperienced in-house or outside investigators. And these two variables produced a small and inconsistent relationship which explained less than 10 percent of the variation in use.

The extent to which the studies were applied varied sharply and neither quality, its variables, nor common sense explained why. In order to discover the answer, we looked intensively at twenty-five audience studies which were selected on the basis of type, region, and currency. Also, we conducted forty-two semi-structured interviews with study directors and with those responsible for study use. As additional background, unstructured interviews were conducted with twenty-five more directors and users.

Through our interviews we learned that, contrary to conventional wisdom, research was not undertaken to solve specific problems and findings were applied in a variety of ways. The chief motives for undertaking audience research were for political leverage or because the opportunity was offered gratis or out of a vague sense of concern for more information of some sort. The results--seventy-seven applications were mentioned--were used for physical planning (29 percent of the uses cited), marketing (20 percent), further research (12 percent), programming (6 percent), and political reasons (22 percent internal and 12 percent external).

Research findings entered into policy decisions in marginal and indirect ways. It was not only a matter of results being applied when they supported existing attitudes and ignored when they did not--though this was characteristic--but it was also that results might fly in the face of other priorities: "Data step on toes," as one study director put it. Further, most cultural organizations have severely limited means to follow up on the direct implications of audience research.

In addition to being applied when they confirmed the suspicions of administrators, results were also likely to be used when they were championed by an influential person, when the authority of outsiders gave them legitimacy, and when researchers were involved in staff deliberations. Along with the limits on use imposed by lack of funds, results were not used when there was high staff turnover (a common problem in cultural organizations) and when they were confusingly reported, not followed up on, or seemed trivial or inconclusive.

It is clear that research findings contributed to policy in highly indirect ways as reinforcing, suggestive, expressive, and symbolic gestures that depend little on the precise technical methods employed. The lack of concern over technical quality in audience research is a rational response to the environment in which these organizations operate.

But that environment is changing, in part because of budget pressures and a general shift in attitudes toward research planning. It is likely that better use will be made of better research, and we recommend the following: support for systematic planning in the arts with some consensus as to the role of audience research; the creation of an information clearinghouse to publicize and disseminate arts research; the establishment of local consortiums for cooperative arts research to aid institutions that cannot afford their own work; and workshops on social science methods for managers and administrators of cultural institutions.

There are a number of gaps in our knowledge about audiences which require several approaches. First of all, we need on a national basis routine gathering of descriptive statistics over time. These should be from a sample stratified according to institutional type, region, degree of urbanization, programming policy, professional status, and ticket prices.

Individual organizations need to standardize their survey data in order to make results more useful to themselves and to others. In conducting a survey, they should base their demographic categories on census schemes; any other or special categories should be highly differentiated. A technique which can be used easily and to good effect by local organizations is cross-tabulation. And information can be increased with little added effort by using census frequencies for metropolitan residents and by asking how often respondents attend during a given period. Also, quasi-experimental design--controlled studies before and after limited policy changes--is a useful methodology that could be employed more often.

Nonattenders, who are of great interest to arts managers, pose a problem for audience research and may require special attention through in-depth interviews.

It seems to us that the more local studies which are published, the better for all concerned and if a clearinghouse were available there would be a pool of information all could usefully draw upon.

A major question of audience research is whether there is one audience or many, and whether any distinctions can be made according to audience types and their responsiveness to such questions as price and program content. Other large questions have to do with the process of socialization of arts audiences and the public for the arts in forms other than live performance.

Certainly cultural organizations can improve the quality and use of audience research by shifting their priorities. But the systematic use of audience research on a wide scale after the fashion of governmental agencies and private industry may be prohibitively expensive.

INTRODUCTION

> To the general play-goer, it is presumed that the most interesting part of a theatre is behind the scenes. To actors and actresses, naturally enough, the chief interest lies with the audience - Before the Footlights..... I never tired of studying the many-headed animal - the Audience. I love to take it up in its different elements, and ponder it - looking out from a cozy corner in a stage-box, myself unobserved. (Logan, 1871: 291)

Although research on the arts audience dates back to the museum visitor studies in the 1920s (Robinson, 1930) and Federal Theater Project performances in the 1930s, such research appears to have been undertaken on a large scale only in the last decade or two. Beginning in the 1950s--with the museum studies of de Borhegyi Hanson, and their colleagues (1968) and Abbey and Cameron (1959, 1960)--and continuing in the 1960's--with the performing arts surveys of Baumol and Bowen (1966)--gathering information about audiences in museums and performing arts institutions has grown to the point where it is nearly commonplace. Of more than 600 arts organizations responding to one recent survey (Johnson and Prieve, 1976), 23 percent had conducted audience surveys within the previous five years. We found a similar situation: out of 612 arts organizations, 27 percent had undertaken such studies in recent memory, and many others were preparing to do so. Furthermore, the generous cooperation we received from overworked and questionnaire-weary individuals in theatres, museums, orchestras, and other arts institutions was itself an expression of a keen interest in the subject of audience surveys. In fact, a surprising number of arts managers sought our advice on specific aspects of the design or execution of audience studies.

In relation to the growing study of arts audiences, our report has two aims. First, we have gathered research on the composition, attitudes, and preferences of arts audiences and have put together a description of important features of the American arts public. In doing so, we drew upon reports, questionnaires, and other materials from more than 250 research projects.

The second aim has been to assess the quality and utility of the arts audience research. This report represents the first evaluation of research in this area; and it is one of the first to study explicitly both how well research has been carried out by social-scientific standards and how useful it has been to the organizations on whose behalf it was undertaken. (For a brief but illuminating study of marketing research by symphony orchestras, see Wainwright (1973)).

We began to gather our information in the following manner. First, an exhaustive library search was conducted for published audience studies and an inquiry form was mailed to over 1,200 museums, performing arts organizations, arts councils, and other organizations concerned with the arts. The form requested information on, and copies of, any audience research with which the recipient had been involved or was acquainted. This search eventually yielded materials on 270 studies.

Second, a longer survey form was sent to the directors of each of more than 100 studies that we had obtained by January 1, 1977. The survey, based on a review of relevant methodological materials and on more than two dozen unstructured interviews with arts administrators and researchers, requested information on the study director, conducting organization, research budget and funding, research methodology, and policy applications. Eighty-six directors responded within the allotted time of approximately three months.

Finally, structured interviews with forty-two directors and users of twenty-five audience studies were conducted in order to better understand the purposes of audience research and the reasons why some studies yield more useful findings than others. The research project selected for case study represented a cross section of art forms and study types.

Our findings and methodology are reported in three chapters. Chapter One presents a synthesis of data on audience composition reported by the studies in our possession. We have analyzed information on gender, age, educational attainment, occupation, income, and race of arts attenders for various art forms. In addition, Chapter One presents information on changes in audience composition over time, differences between frequent and infrequent attenders, and the findings of studies of the economic impact of the arts and of public attitudes toward government financing of the arts. Chapter Two, based on the survey of study directors described above, analyzes the determinants of the technical quality and the effects of quality on the use of audience studies in policy decisions. Chapter Three draws on the case study interviews and describes the reasons audience studies are undertaken, the uses they serve, the ways they enter the decisionmaking process, and the factors influencing their use. Finally, Chapter Four presents an agenda for further research.

It should be noted that references are provided in two ways. References to audience studies are indicated in the text by the study number (e.g., #17) and reported in the List of Studies given in the back. Other references are cited by author and year of publication and are reported in the Bibliography.

This report may be useful to arts managers and policy makers in several respects. First, it presents a comprehensive overview of audience composition and makes clear the limits of the information now available.

Second, it compares the results of audience research carried out under varying circumstances and illuminates why much of that research is less than satisfactory. While there is no easy recipe for ensuring that audience research can be both useful and of the highest quality, the material in these chapters does indicate the complexity of the processes leading to good research and to research use. These chapters also provide insights into those aspects of research management about which something can be done. However, it should be noted that this report presents no guidelines for conducting audience studies. For details on how to go about surveying an audience or set of visitors, see Baumol and Bowen (1966: Appendix IV-1); Cameron and Abbey (1960a, 1960b, 1961); Mann (1966); and Newgren (1972).

Our deepest thanks go to Jane Gallop, who served as this project's administrator, librarian, accountant, editor, secretary, and typist, all with equally great skill, good humor, and forbearance. Against not inconsiderable odds, she succeeded in maintaining order and organization in a singularly centripetal environment.

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Paul DiMaggio
Michael Useem
Paula Brown

CHAPTER 1

THE NATURE OF THE ARTS PUBLIC

The nature of the public for the arts in the United States has been a source of controversy and speculation for much of this country's history. Alexis de Tocqueville, the liberal French aristocrat who studied American democracy during the 1830s, noted then that America's Puritan simplicity and unbounded resources provided more fertile soil for commerce than for art. Nonetheless, he suggested, as the frontier closed and the Puritan legacy was diluted, the natural tendencies of democracy might eventuate in unprecedented public involvement in the arts. "Not only will the number of those who can take an interest in the production of mind be greater," he wrote, "but the taste for intellectual enjoyment will descend, step by step, even to those who, in aristocratic societies, seem to have neither time nor ability to indulge in them" (Tocqueville, 1956: 162).

Tocqueville predicted the democratization of both the production and appreciation of art as the United States became more mature. A half century later Thorstein Veblen, the iconoclastic economist, presented a more pessimistic view. Having witnessed the rise of great fortunes that Tocqueville had not forseen, Veblen feared that the arts (as well as most aspects of culture, learning, and manner) had become the playthings of the rich--baubles and badges of social standing less respected for their beauty or intrinsic merit than for their rarity and expense. High culture, thought Veblen, would remain the preserve of the wealthy because only they had the leisure to attend to it and the power to define what, in fact, would be considered "art" (Veblen, 1899).

The opposing perspectives of Tocqueville and Veblen had been echoed in debates throughout this century. Recently, for example, some writers have discerned a cultural "boom," asserting that the arts, while previously the monopoly of an elite, have become central to the lives of millions of Americans. Alvin Toffler, perhaps the most optimistic spokesman for this position, cites the rise of a massive middle-class constituency for the arts. In earlier years, he says, the arts audience was composed of European-oriented, rich, alienated intellectuals and aspiring artists; but more recently "millions of Americans have been attracted to the arts, changing the composition of the audience profoundly." While not all Americans are part of the culture boom, "a major step toward democratization has, indeed, been taken." As a result, the "rise of a mass public for the arts can, in its way, be compared with the rise of mass literacy in the eighteenth century in England" (Toffler, 1965: 34,51).

Other writers have taken a less sanguine view. Sociologist Herbert Gans argues that high culture remains the preserve of a small circle of aficionados and a diverse "user-oriented" public that includes art patrons, collectors, highly educated professionals, and business executives. But the masses are still not reached, for in the view of Gans high culture continues to serve "a small public that prides itself on exclusiveness" (Gans, 1974: 77).

Sophisticated critics and analysts have failed to agree on whether the art public is mass or elite. The reason, in part, is a matter of definition. Should the term "art" be restricted to paintings hanging in major museums, serious theatre, music played by symphony orchestras, and traditional or experimental opera and ballet? Or should we also include commercial and community theatre, jazz, crafts, foreign films, and "pops" orchestras? By elite, do we mean the rich and the top executives, or does the elite also encompass the upper-middle classes and the college educated? And does the arts public consist, say, of anyone who makes an annual visit to a local art museum, or should the term be restricted to serious consumers of at least one of the traditional art forms? Much of the disagreement about the composition of the arts audience can be attributed to imprecise language. Yet a significant part of the controversy is also due to the state of the research, for however the terms are defined, good research on the public for the arts has been--and to a great extent, still is--relatively scarce and inaccessible, difficult to compare, and often equivocal in its findings.

An exception is William Baumol and William Bowen's careful and extensive study of the audience for the professional performing arts. It remains a landmark work since its publication in 1966. Their assessment indicated that Veblen's insights were more accurate than Tocqueville's. On the much-touted cultural boom of the 1960s, they wrote: "evidence of a modest expansion in performing arts activity..., though by no means negligible, is far from universal and can hardly be called a cultural explosion" (1966: 36). Comparing the performing arts audience to the urban population as a whole, they noted that its members were somewhat younger, far more educated, of higher occupational status, and more affluent. Over 55 percent of the men surveyed had done graduate work (as compared to 5 percent of the adult urban population as a whole), while only 2 to 3 percent of employed males were blue-collar workers (as opposed to 60 percent of the urban population). Frequent attenders were of an even higher status than infrequent visitors. Baumol and Bowen conclude that even "if there has been a significant rise in the size of audiences in recent years, it has certainly not yet encompassed the general public... Attempts to reach a wider and more representative audience, to interest the less educated or the less affluent, have so far had limited effects" (1966: 96).

There is no work comparable to Baumol and Bowen's which deals with museums, although there exists a fifty-year-old tradition of museum research in the United States. Most museum research before 1970 was behavioral, concerned not with who visitors were but with how they responded to and learned from exhibits. The few studies which were nonbehavioral generally indicated that, except for the greater proportion of children, museum visitors were similar in most respects to audiences for the performing arts. Economic and educational profiles look nearly identical. An early study of the Boston Museum of Science, for instance, indicated a well-educated and prosperous clientele; a third of the adult visitors were in professional or technical occupations and over half were college educated (#246). More recently, a 1969 yearlong survey of almost 5,000 visitors to the Smithsonian Institution found that 48 percent of the adults were professionals, 60 percent had family incomes exceeding $10,000, and 70 percent had some college education; only 14 percent were in blue-collar or service occupations (#264). Nonetheless, the studies varied in their findings. While one study found that only 3 to 5 percent of the 1969 visitors of three Manhattan museums were blue-collar workers, museums in neighboring Brooklyn, Yonkers, and Newark were discovered to attract visitor populations that were between 15 and 30 percent blue collar (#16). And one earlier study of the Milwaukee Public Museum revealed that visitors were nearly representative of the American public: of the employed visitors, only a tenth were professionals and nearly half were laborers (#106). Overall, the early research suggested a highly affluent visitor population, one with greater diversity than that for the performing arts but still closer to Veblen than to Tocqueville.

Until recently, however, the paucity of available studies made any generalizations suspect. Only in the past few years has there been a large enough volume of research so that an effort to develop a general portrait of the arts audience is now feasible. Such an effort could answer many questions: Has the audience for the professional performing arts changed in the decade since Baumol and Bowen executed their study? Who goes to museums? Who are the frequent attenders and how do they differ from individuals who go only once? Does arts attendance result in economic benefits for neighboring institutions?

Many of the studies we have used in examining these questions are of low technical quality. Often little care has been given to selecting a set of respondents typical of the audience about which the researchers want to learn; questions are phrased in an imprecise manner; or important information affecting the audience's composition has been left out of the final report. But in an aggregate of more than 250, the bulk of these studies helps us achieve a degree of certainty that we could not expect from one or two alone. If a study of one museum's audience, for example, tells us that a disproportionate number of visitors are women (or men), we can say nothing about the visitors of other museums. If, however, twenty or thirty studies, with differing strengths and faults, report the same findings, we can begin to generalize with some confidence. In addressing these issues we are, of course, limited by the focus and nature of the studies assembled. And in this report's concluding chapter we make some recommendations about the sort of research that is needed to resolve a number of important questions that currently available studies cannot satisfactorily answer.

The issue of this chapter--audience composition, attitudes, and behavior--is not simply academic. Information on audiences is of vital interest to individuals concerned with managing the arts, to those making general policy for the arts, and to the public which has an important stake in these decisions and policies. The arts are increasingly dependent upon public and corporate benefactors for their economic survival. Such donors may want to know just whom their contributions are serving. Particularly for publicly funded arts institutions, establishing the nature and breadth of the clientele to whom services are delivered may be critical to soliciting further support.

If, as many have suggested, exposure to the arts is both personally rewarding and a social good, it is important to know how widely the arts are being distributed. Before making efforts to expand the arts audience or to develop art programs more responsive to public concerns and interests, we should know what groups are not participating, why they do not do so, and what programs have successfully attracted them.

Understanding the audience for the arts is also crucial for a range of decisions that face managers and policy makers at every level. Information on public attitudes to the arts, the composition of existing audiences, and the spending habits of arts attenders can be used to establish policies for public and private support. For instance, information on differing habits and preferences for performance times and ticket prices can be used to set schedules and establish admission prices. And information about who attends and how they learn about exhibits and performances would be helpful in using scarce promotional resources more efficiently.

While the tempo of audience research has increased, some arts managers continue to feel that they know their public, that they have an intuitive grasp of their clientele's nature and needs, and that research is superfluous. What data there is on the question makes these claims appear dubious. In the course of a study of the public for the Royal Ontario Museum, Abbey and Cameron (1961) asked the museum staff to estimate the education and income levels of their visitors. The staff's estimates varied widely from the study's findings: while the staff estimated that 20 percent of the adult visitors had a college or university education, in fact the percentage was 41; and while the staff put the percentage of adult visitors with incomes in the highest category at 10, the actual percentage was 39. It is our sense from conversations with individuals in the arts that such discrepancies are not atypical.

In the remainder of this chapter we use findings from the available studies to estimate the composition of the audience for the arts in the United States. We begin by looking at the basic demographic variables--age, sex, education, income, occupation, and race--and we characterize the arts audience in terms of each, with special attention to variations among art forms. Then we turn our attention to a set of more specific questions. Has the audience composition changed over time? Is there one or are there many audiences for the arts? What has been the impact of the arts on local economies? And what do we know about attitudes toward the arts?

THE STUDIES

Although audience surveys have been conducted for years, very little of the research has been published and many of the studies have been lost or buried in the institutions that conducted them. The resulting lack of centralized information about the utility, design, or results of audience research has proved a serious hindrance to every level of arts organization from the local symphony orchestra to the regional arts council. To help remedy this situation, we wished to acquire as many reports of audience studies as were available. After an initial review of published audience surveys, we identified three basic kinds of studies of audiences for museums and the live performing arts. These three types of studies were: (1) attender surveys, in which the audience of a specific museum or performing arts organization is surveyed, with questions concentrating on social or economic characteristics, motivations for attendance, and related issues; (2) cross-sectional surveys, in which a sample of a local, regional, or national population is surveyed, with questions focusing on frequency of attendance at museums and/or performing arts events, attitudes toward cultural organizations and issues, and the social and economic characteristics of attenders and nonattenders; (3) impact studies, in which the impact of a museum exhibit, arts performance, or other feature of a cultural organization on an audience is evaluated.

We tried in a variety of ways to obtain as complete a set of audience studies as possible. First we conducted an extensive bibliographic search to create a list of published studies conducted after 1950.

Our review of thirty-five standard indexes and bibliographic sources yielded approximately forty-five references. In addition, we also consulted twelve institutional libraries, such as those of the Massachusetts Council for the Arts and the Center for Arts Information in New York City.

However, most audience studies have never been published, and in order to acquire these we directly approached likely organizations. We compiled a list of over 1,200 arts organizations--museums, performing arts organizations, regional, state, and local arts councils, support organizations for specific art forms, and foundations involved in funding the arts. The museums and performing arts organizations on our list were selected from the *Art Museum Directory* and the *National Directory of Civic Centers and Performing Arts Organizations* on the basis of size, as we felt that the larger organizations would be more likely to have conducted an audience survey or to know of other institutions which had. (Inquiries were mailed to all instrumental music and theatrical organizations reporting budgets of over $100,000, all other performing arts organizations with budgets of over $50,000 and all museums reporting 100,000 or more visitors annually.) To test this assumption, we did, however, include 100 smaller museums and performing arts organizations on our list.

In October, 1976, the director or manager of each organization was sent a letter describing our project and a brief form that inquired whether the organization had ever conducted, commissioned, or participated in an audience survey. If the organization had conducted a survey we requested the name and address of the survey's director and either a copy of the final report or information on how to obtain a copy. To those who wished it, complete confidentiality was offered in regard to any materials that were sent to us. Respondents were also asked if they knew of any other institutions that had conducted audience surveys. The response rate to this inquiry ultimately rose to over 50 percent after a follow-up letter and second inquiry form were mailed to institutions that had not yet responded. Those organizations reported by our respondents to have done audience studies were contacted by telephone or mail.

In addition to the bibliographic search and mailed survey, our two major acquisitions efforts, an effort was made to acquire other unpublished audience studies by contacting individuals highly involved in audience research. Finally, queries were placed in eight arts-related periodicals and newsletters (e.g., American Symphony Orchestra League *Newsletter*, *Musical America*, *New York Times Book Review*), requesting audience surveys. This effort yielded a number of additional audience studies.

The response to this search for audience studies was greater than we had expected when we set our initial goal to evaluate all published and unpublished audience surveys conducted since 1964. By the end of the third month of acquisition we had obtained 160 studies and were still receiving new ones. Within nine months of the start of acquisition we had assembled materials on more than 250 audience studies.

Certain difficulties were encountered during the acquisition stage. Because remarkably few reports of audience studies have been published, the majority of studies obtained through the library search were museum studies, reflecting a long tradition of visitor behavioral research that is unique to museums. (Such journals as *Curator* and *Museum News* have published reports of visitor studies since the 1930s.) Other studies reported in the published literature tended to be large-scale, large-budget studies of performing arts audiences or population cross sections.

Studies received in response to the mailed inquiry varied enormously in the amount of information reported. Some consisted of a questionnaire with hand-tallied responses while others contained thorough explanations of methodology and extensive discussions of results. Despite our expressed interest in studies conducted in earlier years, almost all the studies received were conducted after 1970. Approximately 27 percent of the respondents stated that their organization had planned, conducted, or sponsored a study and 20 percent reported familiarity with other audience research.

Efforts to follow up references obtained through the mailed inquiry and bibliographic search met a substantial number of obstacles. Often, people in an institution reported to have conducted an audience study had no recollection of having conducted it or, if they did remember, the survey report had long since been lost. This is due in large part to the high turnover of employees of arts institutions. Often when the person responsible for conducting or initiating a study left the institution, so did the study. It was frequently necessary to contact nearly every department within an institution before we were able to locate someone familiar with surveys conducted as recently as twelve months before. Also, despite an offer of confidentiality, five organizations refused access to their surveys. In this regard, it should be noted that we have no way of estimating the number of surveys that were never meant to come to public attention. The number of explicit refusals received obviously underrepresents the actual number of deliberately buried studies.

Although the studies we collected were of audiences for a wide range of institutions, they do not represent a precise cross section. Surveys of attenders and nonattenders in forty-one states and the District of Columbia are included, as well as several national cross-sectional studies. By art form, the studies include: 74 studies of theatre audiences; 44 studies of art museum visitors; 33 studies of population cross sections; 32 studies of visitors to natural history, general, anthropology, and other related museums and exhibits; 19 studies of science museum or science exhibit visitors; 16 studies of classical music audiences; 14 studies of those attending several kinds of arts institutions; 12 studies of visitors to history museums; 11 studies of visitors to arts centers; 7 studies of opera audiences; and 6 studies of ballet and dance audiences. (Since calcualtions for specific variables were based on subsets of these studies containing relevant data, and since many studies provided data on more than one audience or set of audiences, distributions provided in specific tables in the text of this report indicate the actual number of studies on which any given finding is based.)

In addition to a range of types, these studies include surveys of visitors and audiences for institutions that cover the full range in size. They do not include data on audiences for jazz, folk/ethnic music, or the popular arts or data on audiences for art as transmitted by broadcasting or mechanical means. (For information on audience research in radio and television, see Katzman and Wirt, 1977.)

Since we attempted to acquire as many studies as we could, and since nothing is known about the universe of all studies conducted or about the representativeness of institutions that conduct audience studies, there is undoubtedly some bias in our data. We can only speculate as to the extent to which our summary statistics deviate from the actual composition of American audiences for the live performing arts and for museums. Although most of the studies eventually received were from medium and small institutions, our inquiries were directed disproportionately at large and medium institutions. Thus, the larger institutions are overrepresented in our data, at least in comparison to the percentage they represent of all arts institutions if not in comparison to the percentage of all annual visits and attendance for which they account.

There is some reason to assume that the larger institutions in the larger cities draw a more affluent and well-educated public than smaller or community-based institutions. On the other hand, since the quality of studies was so uneven, since response rates and total numbers of respondents varied so greatly, and since necessary data were not available, there was neither a powerful rationale for nor the possibility of weighting institutions by total attendance in calculating overall figures for audience composition. The effect of granting data from small institutions equal weight with data from major institutions would, we think, tend to compensate for any inflation of high status categories caused by a disproportionate number of studies from major institutions.

The audiences from which data have been drawn may be unrepresentative in several other ways. We do not know if audiences that are studied are systematically different from audiences that have not been studied. Out of the universe of all audience studies that have been conducted, we could speculate that we gathered a larger percentage of published than of unpublished studies, of recent than of less recent studies, of studies for which reports were written than of studies yielding no formal reports, of major inhouse or academic studies than of proprietary studies, of studies of organizations with relatively low staff turnover than of studies of organizations with relatively greater staff turnover, and of demographic and opinion surveys than of studies of exhibit evaluation or performing arts impact. Given the number and diversity of studies from which conclusions are drawn, we do not think that these factors strongly bias findings one way or the other. Nonetheless, the statistics provided in this chapter must be seen as estimates rather than as scientifically rigorous descriptions of the public for museums and the live performing arts.

BASIC DEMOGRAPHICS

Gender

It is believed in many quarters that the public associates the arts with femininity and that this association inhibits men from attending the arts. The Theatre Communications Group, in a 1967 report on audience development, suggests that theatre-going "repudiates for many people the all-American, red-blooded image of what is supposed to be 'all-right' for a man to do and still be considered 'allman'" (Theatre Communications Group, 1967: 31). Consequently, arts audiences are dominated by women, according to this belief. Thus, an early study of a symphony audience concluded that the "sex difference in symphony interest and attendance--more women than men--is borne out by statistic after statistic, study after study. The in-concert survey, the in-home interviews, and hundreds of academic studies irrefutably prove the point." The attendance difference can be traced to an underlying personality difference, according to this study, for "women have greater esthetic appreciation for music, as they do for art and literature, than men, who place greater emphasis on theoretical, economic, political, and practical-success values" (#64: 15). Arts policies are shaped by this perception. Audience development strategies to "de-feminize" the arts have appeared, such as Bradley Morison's (1968) effort to move news and publicity of the Guthrie Theatre from the woman's page to the sports section of Minneapolis newspapers. Similarly, dance companies have occasionally emphasized the athletic prowess of dancers in promotional material.

Other evidence, however, seemingly contradicts the belief that arts audiences are heavily female and that the public considers attendance to be a feminine activity. In a recent national survey of attitudes towards the arts, respondents were asked if "The arts are too effeminate for most men to feel comfortable taking part in them." While 18 percent of the public agreed with this view, an overwhelming majority--65 percent--rejected it (#7: 34). And Baumol and Bowen's (1966) survey of the audiences of more than 150 professional arts organization performances revealed that men were in the majority, composing 52 percent of the average audience.

The true gender composition of the arts audience remains a controversial and unresolved question, no doubt in part because studies have sharply varied in the gender ratios reported. Resolution of the issue requires a systematic assessment of gender ratios across all studies, and in this section we summarize the findings of seventy-two audience studies (which constitute all of the studies in our possession reporting sex composition). In turning to these statistics, it is useful to keep two points in mind. First, there may be a response bias. Baumol and Bowen (1966), for instance, suggest that when survey forms are distributed to couples attending an arts performance, husbands will tend to assert the "male prerogative" and complete the questionnaires themselves, thereby inflating the male proportion in the audience; but Book and Globerman (1975) have argued the opposite, suggesting that the male prerogative in this instance would actually be to delegate the task to the wife, thereby inflating the female proportion in the audience. Such arguments aside, the true extent of the bias either way has not yet been measured, although one study suggests that a slightly greater tendency for men to complete audience questionnaires increases the observed male proportion by 4 to 7 percent above the true percentage. In this study, groups entering a museum were approached and asked to volunteer one person to respond to an interview. In one instance, 54 percent of the volunteers were men, while only 50 percent of the groups were men; in another case, the respective percentages were 58 and 51 (#121).

The second point to keep in mind when interpreting the results of these studies is the presence of sampling error. The samples considered have range from under 100 to over 10,000 respondents; the median size is approximately 500. Statistically, we are 95 percent confident that the true percentage in a sample of 500 is somewhere in between 4 points above and below the observed percentage. With studies of this scope, then, if 40 percent of the respondents are male we can be nearly certain that males are indeed a minority of the audience: but if 48 percent are male, such a conclusion cannot be drawn with great confidence.

Many of the seventy-two studies containing information on sex composition reported results for separate times and performances, and consequently data were available on 112 distinct audiences (67 in the performing arts and 45 for museums). The median percentage of men reported in the studies is displayed in Table 1. While the percentage of men in the U.S.

Table 1 **Men in Audiences by Art Form**

Art Form	Median Percentage	Percentage Range	Number of Studies within Each Percentage Range			Total Number of Studies
			28.1--42.0	42.1-57.0	57.1-72.0	
All Museums	46.0	30-71	13	28	8	49
Art Museums	43.0	30-59	13	16	1	30
History Museums	48.5	44-53	-	4	-	4
Science Museums	52.0	43-71	-	8	7	15
All Performing Arts	42.5	31-58	30	35	2	67
Ballet and Dance	42.0	31-50	9	4	-	13
Theatre	43.5	32-58	15	17	1	33
Orchestra	44.5	33-54	5	7	-	12
Opera	46.1	41-58	1	7	1	9

population is 49, the median percentage of men observed in the museum studies was 46 and in the performing arts was 43. It is evident that women participate in arts audiences in proportions greater than their share of the public as a whole, but the extent is very modest. Moreover, the gender ratio varied extensively from audience to audience; the male percentage ranged from 30 to 71 percent in the case of museums and from 31 to 58 percent for the performing arts. In fact, men outnumbered women in a quarter of the performing arts studies and two-fifths of the museum visitor surveys. We have been unable to identify the factors that account for the striking gap between the average male percentage reported in the performing arts studies surveyed here (43 percent) and the average male percentage (52 percent) found in the performing arts surveys conducted by Baumol and Bowen (1966).

The median figure for sex composition varied among the art forms. Art museums drew a higher proportion of women (57 percent of their visitors on average), while history museums attracted equal representation of both sexes and science museums were slightly favored by men (52 percent of the visitors). Within the performing arts, ballet and dance acquired the largest female audience (60 percent on average); opera drew the largest proportion of males, though men still did not constitute a majority (46 percent). Even within these art forms, the sex composition varied widely; opera audiences, for instance, ranged from three-fifths men to three-fifths women, and art museum visitors varied from three-fifths men to two-thirds women.

Along with a slight overall tendency for women to outnumber men in arts audiences, but not among history and science museum visitors, it is clear that the sex ratio varied enormously. In other words, the median figures represent statistical tendency and are poor predictors of the composition of an actual arts audience.

Although a fraction of the wide variation observed in audience gender ratios is undoubtedly due to sampling fluctuation and to the use of nonprobability sampling techniques (which can introduce systematic bias), a substantial part of the variation stems from other factors. Perhaps of greatest significance is whether the visiting or performance time is during a workday. Weekdays are obviously unattractive for most working people, and the labor force participation rate of men is approximately twice that of women (fewer than half of working age women are employed). This time factor may account for as much as 10 percent or more of the variation in sex composition. A study of visitors to New York's Natural History Museum found that 52 percent of the weekday visitors were men, contrasting with 59 percent on Saturdays (#203). Another inquiry revealed that while men and women were equally represented on Sundays among museum visitors in the New York metropolitan region, the composition shifted to 62 percent women on Thursday (#16). Similarly, studies of performing arts audiences in the states of New York and Washington found that the proportion of men in the audience fluctuated by 10 percent depending on the time of the performance (#73; #63).

There is some evidence that the content of the performance or exhibit may attract men and women differently. For instance, the proportion of men in the weekend audience of various productions of the Joffrey Ballet ranged from 33 to 44 percent (#94). And a study of visitors to the Chicago Art Institute discovered that 10 percent more women attended during a week in which a special Monet exhibit was on temporary display than during three other weeks (#135). Factors associated with geographic region may also influence the sex composition. Thus, 51 percent of the New York City performing arts audience are women, 53 percent of the New York state audience are women, and 62 percent of the Washington state attenders are women. However, the regional factors accounting for this variation have not yet been identified (#73; #63).

Age

The age composition of the audience for the arts has interested arts administrators for a number of reasons. A profile of the age of the audience, of course, can help direct audience development efforts towards one age group or another. Recently, for instance, there has been a movement to make the arts more accessible to older Americans by offering transportation, ticket discounts, and special performance times (Johnson and Prieve, 1976). It is also believed that a young attender may grow up to be an old attender and, while the link between attendance in one's youth and in one's prime has not yet been fully described, arts managers often view a young audience with an optimistic eye to the future. The age composition of the audience also raises other interesting if more academic questions. Is culture an acquired taste? Does the age composition of the audience differ from that of the general population? On the latter question, most observers believe the difference is small. Johnson and Prieve (1976), for instance, asked 605 arts administrators whether they thought that the age breakdown of their audience was roughly equivalent to that of the community: 60 percent said yes, while 18 percent felt their audience was younger and 16 percent felt it was older.

Two factors should be kept in mind when examining the age data. First, some of the studies in our possession restricted their subject population to those individuals over a certain age. Ten of forty museum studies surveyed only those over sixteen years of age and eight included only those who were over ten years of age. Likewise, nine of the performing arts studies restricted their sample to those over sixteen and seven limited their sample to audience members over ten. To examine whether this restriction made any systematic difference in the results of the studies, we compared the median ages reported by the studies that did restrict their samples with studies that did not. Surprisingly, there were no systematic differences.

It may be that many of the studies actually limited their sample population but did not state so in the report. Also, it is possible that the study procedures were frequently biased against the very young because of the difficulties of obtaining reliable data from them. Another possibility is that the population under sixteen is indeed negligible, although available evidence suggests that this is the case only for the perfroming arts and art museums. Studies of history and science museum visitors that explicitly did not restrict their sample often reported substantial numbers of young children. The Nassau County Historical Museum in New York, for instance, reported that 40 percent of their visitor population was under thirteen (#2) and the Franklin Institute in Philadelphia found that 39 percent of their visitors were under twelve and 4 percent were under five years of age (#234). However, science and history museum studies generally report far greater numbers of children attending than do art museums. The Minneapolis Institute of Art found that the proportion of visitors under thirteen was under 3 percent in 1970 and 1971 (#247), and the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston reported that only one in fifty of their visitors was under sixteen (#17). Studies of performing arts audiences show, on the whole, a comparably small percentage of visitors under sixteen.

Another factor that may affect study results is the presence of response bias. Perhaps youths defer to adults when responding to surveys, thus making the audience appear older than it really is. The New York State Museum, for example, found few respondents under 14 years old in one survey but noted that the actual proportion in attendance was approximately representative of the young population at large (#121). In this study, groups entering a museum were approached and asked to volunteer one person to respond to an interview. The interviewer also collected data on the group composition. The age composition of the group was inferred from the group's education levels.

Eighty-two of the studies in our possession contained data on the age composition of 145 distinct audiences. Most of these studies presented the data as the percent of the audience falling within various age categories. Unfortunately, the age categories varied widely. We have computed the median age for each audience (see Table 2) and to allow for comparison between the age composition of each art form, we also have found the median of the median ages. We refer to this number as the median age of the art form.

The median age of 105 audiences of the performing arts was thirty-five, while the median age of 40 museum visitor populations was thirty-one. This difference is consistent with the results of two studies of the arts audience conducted by the National Research Center of the Arts (NRCA). They found that the median age of thirty-seven for the performing arts in New York State was five years older than the median age of the museum visitor population (#73).

The summary statistics indicate that the median age for the performing arts audience was in the middle to late thirties while the median age for the museum visitor population was in the early thirties. These figures lie between the median age of the entire U.S. population (twenty-eight) and the median age for the population sixteen and over (forty). On the average, audiences exhibited age profiles in a range similar to that of the entire population. However, specific audiences frequently diverged from this central tendency, and there was a great difference in the average ages within and among the performing art and museum types.

Table 2 **Age of Audiences by Art Form**

Art Form	Median of Median Ages	Range of Median Ages	Number of Studies within Each Age Range								Total Number of Studies
			19-22	22-36	27-30	31-34	35-38	39-42	43-46	47-51	
All Museums	31	19-51	2	2	16	11	3	4	1	2	40
Art Museums	31	26-51	-	1	6	6	2	2	1	1	19
History Museums	33	28-42	-	-	2	1	1	1	-	-	5
Science Museums	29	19-40	2	1	8	4	-	1	-	-	16
All Performing Arts	35	21-49	5	7	14	23	22	21	8	5	105
Ballet and Dance	33	30-38	-	-	1	11	3	-	-	-	15
Theatre	34	21-48	5	6	12	9	13	10	3	2	60
Orchestra	40	24-49	-	1	1	2	3	8	3	2	20
Opera	41	33-44	-	-	-	1	3	3	2	1	10

Ballet and theater attracted the youngest audiences of the performing arts while opera and symphony drew the oldest audiences. The NRCA studies found an identical age rank ordering of the four performing art forms in their studies of audiences in New York State and Washington State. Baumol and Bowen (1966) identified almost the same pattern except that the average age of the opera attender was higher than that of the symphony attender.

The median age for the science museum visitor was two years lower than that of the art museum visitor, a difference that was not as great as among the various performing arts forms. NRCA also found that the museum visitor population was older in art museums than in science museums.

The age composition of the audience may vary systematically with the seasons of the year, with the summer attracting younger visitors. NRCA found that the median age of performing arts audiences in New York State was thirty-three in the summer and thirty-eight in the fall though the same did not appear to be true of the museum visitor population. However, the Boston Museum of Fine Arts (#17) did find a slight seasonal variation: the median age of the winter visitors was twenty-eight, while the average for the summer visitors was twenty-six. The results of the other museum studies yield no consistent pattern. The Natural History Museum in New York (#203) found no variation, but the Chicago Art Museum (#135) found that visitors were younger in June and November than in February and March.

The time of the performance seems to affect audience age. NRCA found that the median age for weekend evening performances was consistently lower than it was for matinees. In Washington State the median age for weekend evenings was forty, for weekday evenings forty-two, and for matinees forty-nine. In New York State on weekend evenings it was thirty-five, on weekday evenings thirty-seven, and on matinees forty-six. Audiences for the Joffrey Ballet (#94) showed this same pattern: the median age for the weekend evening audience was thirty-one while for matinee audiences it was thirty-three.

There is some evidence that different programs have greater attraction for certain age groups than others. The previously mentioned study of the Joffrey Ballet reports that the median age of the audience for a performance promoted as a rock evening was younger than for other performances, and Moore's study of Broadway theatre audiences found that musicals attracted a younger audience than other plays (#38).

NRCA reports differences in the age composition of different regions. The median age of the performing arts audience in one region (Southern Tier Central, Finger Lakes) of New York State was thirty-three, while the median age was forty-four in another region (New York City suburbs, mid-Hudson). They also report a higher median age for both the performing arts audience and the museum visitor population in Washington State than in New York State. However, the reasons for this regional variation are unclear.

Education

Of all the characteristics of individuals that studies frequently measure, a person's educational background appears to be the best predicator of his or her attendance at museums and live performing arts events. The Ford Foundation noted for example, that while frequency of attendance at a variety of performing arts was related to both income and education, the latter factor was by far the more important of the two. Individuals with much education but little money were more likely to attend the theatre, symphony, opera, and ballet than people with high incomes but little education (115: 14-16). Similarly, analysis of a national cross-sectional study of residents of cities and suburbs found education to be a better determinant of attendance at concerts, plays, museums, and fairs than income or occupational standing (Gruenberg, 1975).

There are reasons why individuals with education, particularly higher education, might be expected to attend more arts events than their less educated peers. Schooling exposes students to formal training in the arts and, perhaps more important, to a social milieu in which the arts are performed, exhibited, and discussed (The Arts, Education and Americans Panel, 1977).

Then, too, arts attendance is a habit that one develops over a period of time. A person may enjoy opera, but if performances are not locally available, or there is no one to go with, he or she is unlikely to attend. By the same token, one may find modern painting incomprehensible, but if one's friends frequent galleries and museums, sooner or later one is likely to give it a try. Education, particularly higher education, provides both an environment in which the arts are relatively accessible and a group of peers who attends with regularity.

Finally, a disproportionate number of men and women who acquire a higher education have parents who are also well educated. Children of the well educated are more likely than others to have been exposed to the arts when they were young and may already frequent the arts by the time they reach college (DiMaggio and Useem, 1978).

To learn about the educational attainment of the American arts audience, we analyzed the results of seventy-one studies reporting findings of 108 audiences for the performing arts and museums. In doing this, we faced several methodological problems. First of all, different studies used different categories. Since median education levels could not be calculated for every study, it was necessary to describe audience educational composition by reporting the percentages of an audience that fell in five categories of educational attainment.

A second problem involved differences in sampling designs used in the various audience studies. Of the 107 audiences for which findings were reported in at least one of our five education categories, 57 indicated a minimum age criterion had been used to exclude audience members from either the sample or the analysis. Minimum ages, when reported, differed considerably. Three studies excluded audience members younger than ten, three used cutoff ages from thirteen to fifteen, and twenty cutoff ages from sixteen to eighteen. Studies of sixteen audiences asked for the education of the household head only, one survey excluded "non-adults," another excluded "students," and one included only nonstudents eighteen years and older. Twelve studies reported the educational attainment of only those respondents aged twenty-five or over. Also, it is likely that children were underrepresented in samples that did not explicitly exclude them: completing questionnaires is difficult and adults may tend to answer on behalf of children.

The extent of this underrepresentation cannot be determined. Differences in the respondent age criterion no doubt affect the findings to some extent. Nonetheless, major differences in the findings of studies with different exclusionary principles did not appear, so all studies are pooled in the analysis here.

As expected, the educational attainment of the arts audience surveyed was substantially higher than that for the adult public at large. For example, 30 percent of the typical audience had some graduate training: 54 percent had at least acquired a bachelor's degree, compared to 14 percent for the adult population in general (see Table 3). Only 22 percent on average had not attended any college, compared to 74 percent of the public as a whole, and only 5 percent were not high school graduates, in contrast to 38 percent of the general adult public.

There was considerable variation among studies. Two of the most extreme figures in the individual studies--6 percent of the audience had graduate training and 57 percent had not completed high school--were reported in a study of the Milwaukee Public Museum in 1962-63 (#35). Since almost half the respondents were aged seventeen or younger and more than three-quarters were less than twenty-four years of age, this accounts for much of the extremely low educational level. A study of the same institution two years later, excluding children under thirteen, found only 25 percent of the visitors to be non-high school graduates (#108).

The educational attainment of live performing arts audiences was somewhat higher than that of museum visitors. Some, but not all, of the discrepancy is attributable to the greater representation of young people still in school among museum visitors.

As anticipated, those studies which excluded children under ages ranging from 10 to 15 had a higher median percentage of non-high school graduates (24 percent) than those excluding visitors under the ages of from 16 to 20 (where it was 7 percent). The median percentage of non-high school graduates in studies with no explicit exclusionary rule was 16 percent, probably reflecting unreported de facto exclusion of younger visitors. At the other end of the educational scale, studies that excluded only the very young reported a median of 24 percent of visitors with college degrees, while studies that drew the line higher recorded a median of 43 percent. Studies that did not explicitly exclude anyone reported an audience median for college graduates of 45 percent, again suggesting that the young were under-sampled. However, even the set of museums that excluded their younger visitors from the survey reported audiences slightly less well educated than the typical performing arts audience.

Among the performing arts, ballet and dance audiences included slightly above average proportions of well-educated attenders; theatre audiences included

Table 3

Percentage of Audiences in Five Educational Categories by Art Form

	Educational Level														
	Post-BA Training			At Least College Graduate			At Least Some College			High School Graduate or Less			Less Than High School Graduate		
Art Form	Median	Range	(N)[1]	Median	Range	(N)	Median	Range	(N)	Median	Range	(N)	Median	Range	(N)
All Museums	17.5	6-35	(13)	41.1	10-66	(23)	72.3	30-93	(18)	27.6	8-69	(18)	9.0	4-57	(23)
Art Museums	22.0	18-35	(5)	48.0	41-66	(9)	83.5	75-90	(6)	17.0	10-25	(6)	5.5	4-16	(8)
Other Museums[2]	13.5	6-20	(8)	34.4	10-53	(14)	59.6	30-93	(12)	40.4	8-69	(12)	13.1	7-57	(14)
All Performing Arts[3]	32.0	9-66	(42)	61.8	23-87	(53)	83.0	62-95	(44)	17.0	5-38	(45)	4.0	1-19	(45)
Theatre[3]	32.7	20-50	(24)	58.0	23-80	(27)	82.7	56-93	(25)	17.1	8-44	(26)	4.0	1-15	(21)
Classical Music	37.5	21-66	(8)	63.0	46-87	(9)	83.4	63-95	(8)	14.6	5-37	(8)	1.7	1-19	(8)
Ballet and Dance[4]	45.5	20-50	(5)	65.0	55-73	(10)	87.1	77-92	(5)	12.9	8-23	(5)	3.0	1-5	(10)
Opera	37.3	29-49	(5)	61.8	49-75	(7)	83.0	67-94	(6)	18.8	7-33	(6)	4.1	2-7	(6)
All Museums and Performing Arts[5]	30.0	6-66	(73)	54.0	10-87	(97)	78.0	30-95	(83)	22.0	5-69	(84)	5.0	1-57	(72)
U.S. Population over 24 Years of Age, 1975	NA[6]			13.9			26.3			73.7			37.5		

[1] (N) = Number of studies.

[2] Includes science, history, natural history, anthropology, and general museums.

[3] Excludes audiences of outdoor dramas.

[4] Dance audience percentages apart from ballet available only for two educational levels—at least college graduate and less than high school graduate.

[5] Number of studies exceeds sum of other categories due to inclusion of regional studies reporting attendance of all, undifferentiated art forms.

[6] NA = Not available

slightly below average proportions. And among museums, art museums attracted a more highly educated public than did history, science, and other museums, though still not so well educated as the audiences for the performing arts.

Overall, the proportion of college graduates reported for the arts audiences and museum visitors exceeded the proportion of the adult population with college diplomas in all but one of ninety-seven audience studies; and the percentage of individuals who had not completed high school was below the national level in seventy-one of seventy-two audiences. Both exceptions are due to presence of students still in high school. And in seventy-eight of eighty-three audiences for which findings are available, the proportion of attenders with at least some college training was twice that for the general public.

The studies that we reviewed show audiences to be somewhat less educationally exclusive than did the Baumol and Bowen study of the performing arts (1966). There were discrepancies. The relatively high proportion of individuals with no college education reported in some of our studies of opera audiences is surprising, for example. But most differences can be attributed to Baumol and Bowen's exclusion of respondents under the age of twenty-five and to the restriction of their audiences to the professional performing arts.

In sum, it is evident that visitors to museums and audiences for the live performing arts in these studies had considerably more education than the public at large. Museums appeared to serve a somewhat broader public than did the performing arts. Nonetheless, in terms of educational attainment, the museum visitors and performing arts audiences surveyed were far more similar to one another than either group was to the general public.

Occupation

Next to education, occupation is perhaps the demographic characteristic most closely related to involvement in the arts. Gruenberg found occupational status a more significant predictor of attendance at cultural events and institutions (concerts, plays, museums, fairs, and adult education classes) than income, second only to educational attainment (Gruenberg, 1975). And cross-sectional studies of national and local populations have consistently found higher rates of attendance among professionals and managers than any other group (#'s 73, 115, 137, 142).

This tendency is not surprising. For one thing, those occupational groups that show the highest rates of attendance are also those with the highest educational attainment. Blue-collar workers, who attend least, also have the least education. Moreover, one's job determines to a great extent the social milieu in which one spends leisure time. The participation of a lawyer, teacher, or physician in the arts may be rewarded with respect by associates and peers; among these groups, attendance at the theatre or symphony is an accepted way of spending a social evening. By contrast, a carpenter or bus driver with a penchant for the arts perhaps receives less encouragement from friends and co-workers.

To better understand the occupational composition of American arts attenders, we analyzed the results of fifty-nine studies of ninety-six audiences that asked respondents to report their occupations. Our findings were consistent with the expectation that art audiences are dominated by individuals in higher status occupations. Professionals, who constituted 15 percent of the employed civilian labor force in 1975, composed a median 56 percent of employed persons in the arts audiences surveyed (see Table 4). Conversely, blue-collar workers typically constituted a mere 4 percent of employed respondents in the arts audience surveyed as compared to 34 percent of the employed civilian labor force.

Although the summary statistics are striking, the reader should be cautioned that the median figures are to be regarded as approximations. The classification schemes used in the audience studies were so varied that comparability was established only with great difficulty. The occupational categories we used here are designed to be compatible with as many study findings as possible and to be comparable to the classifications used by the United States Census.

Categories used to report occupation in some study reports were vague enough to encompass those employed in several more conventional categories. For example, many studies used an occupational category called "business," which may in some cases have included business secretaries and clerks as well as executives while excluding managers of public and nonprofit concerns. Because most studies reported

Table 4 Occupational Distribution of Audiences

Occupations of Employed Persons[1]	Percentage of U.S. Employment (1975)[2]	Median Percentage of Employed Respondents in Arts Audience[3]	Number of Audience Studies Reporting Information for this Category
Professionals	15.0	55.9	65
Teachers	4.1	22.1	22
Artists, Writers, Entertainers	1.0	8.2	8
Managerial	10.5	14.9	51
Clerical/Sales	24.3	14.6	41
Service	13.7	3.7	13
Blue-Collar	33.0	3.7	71
Farmworkers	3.5	-	-[4]
Major Activities of Persons Unemployed or Not In the Labor Force	**Percentage of U.S. Population Aged 16 Years or Over**	**Median Percentage of All Respondents in Arts Audience**	**Number of Audience Studies Reporting Information for this Category**
Homemakers	23.1	14.0	78
Students	5.5	18.0	80
Retired, Unemployed	11.2	4.5	65

[1] U.S. Census categories and audience categories are only approximately comparable due to varying classification schemes used in arts audience studies.

[2] Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Statistical Abstracts, 1976 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1976); U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Handbook of Labor Statistics, 1976). Figures for U.S. population aged 16 or over exclude military personnel.

[3] Because these are medians and because not all occupational categories were given in each study, an aggregation of the median percentages across occupations will not equal 100 percent. Thus, these figures offer only an approximate distribution of the arts audience by occupation.

[4] None of the arts audience studies contained an occupational category for farmworkers. Thus, they were either distributed among the other categories or very few, if any, were found in the arts audiences.

occupation as a percentage of total respondents rather than as a percentage of employed respondents, results from many studies had to be recomputed. In some cases, study categories were merged to fit into the scheme used here. When study results could not be reliably altered to fit our classification system, the findings were dropped. Our categories, then, represent a compromise. While the findings can be used with confidence to assess general similiarities and differences among art forms, great precision should not be attributed to the figures reported here.

An additional caveat: Even in those cases where audience studies used classifications similar to census categories, only the most experienced analysts can unerringly place specific occupations into their appropriate general categories. For example, airplane pilots are considered professionals, ship pilots are managers, and airplane stewardesses are service employees; registered nurses are professionals, while practical nurses are service employees; an inspector is blue-collar unless he is a construction inspector, in which case he is managerial. Few people on either end of an audience survey--visitors responding to forced-choice occupation questions or coders classifying open-ended ones--can be expected to have mastered the precise technical census system, and a degree of error is to be expected.

Finally, a word about "status." This concept is based on the average education and income within an occupation. In turn, the mean educational attainment and income closely relate to the appraisals in cross-sectional surveys by respondents who are asked to rate the status or prestige of sets of occupations. The several schemes used to assign status to occupation yield highly similar rankings (Haug, 1977).

Professionals. As noted, one of the most striking consistencies in the occupational distribution of the arts audiences surveyed was the very high representation of professionals. They were present in numbers proportionately greater than their share of the population in every one of the sixty-five arts audiences for which appropriate data were reported. In all but four of these audiences, the percentage of professionals was at least twice that of the work force as a whole, in forty-six audiences it was three times, and in more than a quarter of the audiences it was four times greater than in the work force.

It should be noted that the U.S. Census category of professional which we follow includes not only such individuals as doctors, lawyers, and architects but also members of lower status professions such as teachers, engineers, librarians, dieticians, social workers, and computer programmers. The number of respondents falling in this category may be understated since individuals in lower status technical professions seem to have been included in the residual "white-collar" categories used by some studies. For example, in a 1976 study of the Guthrie Theatre audience (#122), in which only teachers, doctors, and lawyers were coded as professionals and a residual white-collar category was used, the professional percentage of the employed audience was only 40.4 percent, compared to 56.5 percent in studies of the Guthrie audience undertaken in 1963 and 1973 (#117, #126). The latter had precoded professional, technical, and clerical/sales categories. (For the few studies that included separate "technical" categories, "technical" respondents were included with "professionals" for this analysis.)

There was a significantly higher proportion of professionals in the audience for the performing arts than for museums, 59 percent compared to 42 percent (see Table 5). The lower overall median for museums was the result of the proportions at museums other than art (which comprised eleven of the seventeen museum studies found). These reported a median 42 percent professional representation. The six art museum visitor studies had a median of 59 percent of professionals, the same figure as for the performing arts.

Except for this profile within a museum category, findings were remarkably uniform for the various art forms. Among the performing arts, median professional percentages ranged from 56 percent for the theatre to 61 percent for classical music audiences. These figures are similar to but slightly lower than Baumol and Bowen's findings (1966) on occupation. The discrepancy is probably attributable to the presence of a greater proportion of relatively major institutions among whose audiences they sampled.

One group of professionals--teachers--appeared to play a special role in the arts audience. Overall, teachers (including college and university faculty) constituted 22 percent of the arts audiences for which findings were available. This figure was more than five times their percentage of the employed

Table 5 **Occupational Distribution of Audiences by Art Form**

Art Form	Professional & Managerial Median	Professional & Managerial Range	Professional & Managerial (N)[2]	Professional Only Median	Professional Only Range	Professional Only (N)	Teachers Median	Teachers Range	Teachers (N)	Managerial Only Median	Managerial Only Range	Managerial Only (N)
	Occupations[1] of Employed Persons (Percents)											
All Museums	63.3	17-96	(32)	42.2	12-[illegible]	[illegible]	23.1	15-33	(6)	9.6	4-27	(14)
Art Museums	77.1	56-96	(16)	59.2	31-[illegible]	[illegible]	23.1	15-33	(5)	9.0	4-27	(6)
Other Museums[3]	53.2	27-72	(16)	41.9	12-[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	-	-	10.2	6-22	(8)
All Performing Arts	70.9	49-95	(42)	59.1	24-80	(44)	17.9	6-33	(16)	15.6	4-27	(33)
Ballet and Dance	74.6	61-88	(9)	59.6	55-73	(8)	-	-	-	15.2	7-22	(7)
Theatre	69.5	49-95	(23)	56.3	24-70	(25)	17.9	6-33	(7)	16.0	4-27	(20)
Orchestra	75.5	64-87	(5)	61.1	50-80	(6)	-	-	-	-	-	-
Opera	-	-	-	58.3	50-70	(5)	-	-	-	-	-	-

(Table 5 continued)

	Occupations[1] of Employed Persons						Major Activities of Persons Unemployed or Not In the Labor Force								
	Clerical & Sales			Blue-Collar			Homemakers			Students			Retired & Unemployed		
ART FORM	Median	Range	(N)[2]	Median	Range	(N)	Median	Range	(N)	Median	Range	(N)	Median	Range	(N)
All Museums	14.3	5-28	(23)	8.5	0-45	(35)	14.5	6-26	(24)	22.0	0-57	(25)	5.0	1-21	(21)
Art Museums	14.3	4-22	(14)	3.1	0-12	(16)	13.0	7-22	(9)	22.5	0-40	(10)	8.0	3-21	(9)
Other Museums[3]	16.0	5-28	(9)	16.7	4-45	(19)	15.8	6-26	(15)	20.0	10-57	(15)	3.3	1-9	(12)
All Performing Arts	18.0	8-33	(15)	2.8	0-27	(34)	14.0	5-52	(51)	17.1	5-63	(51)	3.9	0-16	(40)
Ballet and Dance	-	-	-	2.7	1-7	(10)	11.1	6-32	(10)	15.0	9-34	(10)	3.0	1-5	(9)
Theatre	19.7	8-29	(10)	2.9	0-27	(15)	14.0	5-52	(27)	18.9	5-63	(27)	4.2	0-26	(24)
Orchestra	-	-	-	-	-	-	19.0	5-26	(7)	18.0	7-31	(7)	-	-	-
Opera	-	-	-	2.8	1-13	(5)	16.2	8-40	(6)	10.7	7-23	(6)	-	-	-

[1] The "Professional & Managerial" and "Professional Only" categories include teachers. The percentages for "Homemakers", "Students", and "Retired & Unemployed" are based on all respondents; the percentages for the other categories are based on employed respondents only. Percentages are not reported when fewer than five studies are available.

[2] (N) = Number of studies

[3] Includes science, history, natural history, anthropology, and general museums.

[4] Excludes audiences of outdoor dramas.

civilian work force (4.1 percent). Assuming that the twenty-two audiences for which this category was reported are not systematically different from other audiences, the median percentage of teachers among professionals in the audiences (37.7 percent) exceeds the percentage of teachers among professionals in the employed work force as a whole (28.2 percent in 1970) by more than a third. Thus teachers seem to be heavy attenders among heavy attenders.

A second professional group participating in arts audiences at rates well above their share of the population was, not surprisingly, individuals in the arts. Although artists, writers, and entertainers comprised only 1 percent of the employed work force in 1970, in eight audiences for which findings were reported they accounted for a median 8.2 percent. A fraction of the high ratio may stem from dubious sampling procedures, a possible tendency for researchers coding handwritten occupation responses to report artists as a separate category if they were particularly numerous, and the temptation for some students and amateurs to report an avocation as an occupation.

Managerial. The managerial category in the United States Census covers a range of managers and administrators, including executives, government officials, sales managers, school and hospital administrators, union officials, and small businessmen. However, the audience studies we looked at included executives, managers, business, and proprietors. As noted earlier, the "business" category may have some clerical/sales employees and leave out some public administrators. Similarly the "executive" category may leave out some proprietors and low level managers. Nonetheless, it is assumed that the Census category which we use and the audience studies category are roughly equivalent.

Managers were found to participate in arts audiences in greater proportions than their share of the population but to a lesser extent than professionals. They composed a median 15 percent of employed respondents in fifty-one arts audiences but only 11 percent of the employed work force in 1975. Their median proportion of performing arts audiences (16 percent) was higher than their share of museum visitors (9 percent and 10 percent for art and other museums, respectively).

However, since the number of museum audiences reporting this category is small and the percentage range within the museum and the performing arts studies are high, not too much should be made of this difference.

Professional/managerial. A number of studies merged professionals and managers into a single category. In order to use this information, we joined the professional and managerial categories in other studies and pooled them with studies reporting only professional/managerial percentages. Professional/managerial percentages may be taken as a rough index of the representation of individuals in high status occupations in the audiences surveyed.

Among employed respondents, the median percentage of professional/managerial workers in seventy-seven arts audiences for which data were available was 69.5 percent, more than double this group's fraction of the employed work force as a whole (25.5 percent). As with professionals alone, there was some disparity between art museum and other museum visitors. The managerial/professional percentage for art museums was 77.1 percent, even higher than for any of the performing arts, while the percentage for other museums was 53.2 percent, lower than for any art form reporting.

Clerical/sales. The clerical/sales category includes, among others, office workers, secretaries, sales clerks, advertising, real estate, stock and bond sales workers, and telephone operators. However, some schemes specified that secretaries were included but others did not. Residual white-collar categories were excluded from this analysis except in a very few cases where white-collar unambiguously included only clerical/sales employees. Since a number of occupations listed as clerical/sales by the Census--for instance, bill collectors, mailmen, and teacher's aides--are difficult to classify, there may have been slight leakage from this category into business, blue-collar, or service categories.

Clerical and sales personnel composed a somewhat smaller percentage of audiences than their share of the employed civilian work force. Of forty-one audiences, they made up a median of 15 percent, while they constitute 24 percent of the full employed civilian work force. The median for the performing arts (18 percent) was slightly higher than for museums (14 percent).

Blue-collar workers. Along with the extremely high proportions of professionals reported, the most striking finding in the studies reviewed was the consistently low percentages of blue-collar workers relative to their share of the population. In the seventy-one audiences for which data were available, blue-collar workers comprised a median 4 percent of those employed. That the median is even this high is partly due to the inclusion of 19 "other museum" audiences, which reported a much higher median blue-collar participation (17 percent). The median blue-collar share of performing arts audiences was only 2.8 percent and blue-collar representation among art museum visitors was a median 3.1 percent. Excluding visitors to museums other than art museums, the proportion of blue-collar workers in thirty-four of fifty-two arts audiences for which percentages were reported was less than one-tenth of their representation in the work force as a whole. In only nine audiences was it as high as two-fifths. Among art forms, median blue-collar percentages were remarkably consistent: 2.7 percent for ballet and dance; 2.8 percent for opera; 2.9 percent for theatre; and 3.1 percent for art museums.

Remarkably, blue-collar attendance is, if anything, probably overstated. Blue-collar workers include individuals in the skilled trades (carpenters, shoemakers, television repairmen), factory workers, laborers, and some transportation workers (including bus, taxi, and truck drivers and parking attendants). Holders of a number of other low-status jobs (chambermaids, janitors, busboys, dishwashers, bootblacks, elevator operators) are classified in a separate "service" category. However, information on the percentage of service employees was available for only eleven of the seventy-one audiences that reported a blue-collar percentage. (Since the service category also contains a number of relatively high-status workers like stewardesses, sheriffs, and detectives, blue-collar and service categories could not be merged.) It seems likely that, in studies where percentages of service workers were not reported, individuals in the service category (1.7 to 20.0 percent of audiences were reported, with a median of 3.7 percent) were divided between "blue-collar" and residual white-collar categories, thus giving some upward bias to the totals of each.

Homemakers. The median percentage of homemakers in seventy-eight audiences for which appropriate information was available was 14. While homemakers were thus statistically underrepresented--in 1975 they comprised 23 percent of the civilian population over sixteen--variation among audiences was great, ranging from 5 percent to 52 percent for the audiences as a whole. The median percentage for the performing arts was very similar to that for all museums. The median percentage for art museums was somewhat lower than for other museums but the ranges were similar. The ballet/dance audiences had the lowest median percentage of homemakers and the classical music audiences the highest, but again ranges were similar.

Students. Students participated in the arts audiences to a high degree, composing 18 percent of the average of eighty audiences for which data were available but making up only 6 percent of the civilian population over sixteen. Most of the students were enrolled in colleges. The only surveys reporting appreciable numbers of respondents less than sixteen years old were from museums other than art museums, and their median is not much higher than that for the audiences as a whole. It would be interesting to know to what degree the high percentage of students is a measure of the success of cultural organizations in attracting them by special discounts and other incentives.

As with homemakers, the proportion of students varied widely from audience to audience, with a range from 0 percent (found in one study of members only (#181)) to 63 percent (an audience of a student theatrical production (#127)).

Retired and unemployed. The median percentage of retired and unemployed persons in sixty-five audiences for the arts with appropriate data was 5 percent, as compared to 11 percent of the 1975 civilian population over sixteen. This figure would seem to reflect the relative immobility and often severe financial deprivation of individuals in both groups, as well as their relatively low educational attainment. Percentages did not differ greatly among art forms.

In most cases, audience studies presented data both on retired and on unemployed persons; sometimes a single category including both. In our analysis, percentages of retired persons alone were occasionally included since the representation of the unemployed, where listed separately, was consistently minuscule. Downward bias in the totals may result from a possible tendency for individuals who are unemployed, underemployed, retired, or semiretired to report their regular occupations.

Summary of Occupations. Audiences for museums and the live performing arts were found to include substantially more individuals in high prestige occupations than the public at large. The two most striking findings in the materials analyzed were the extremely high proportions of professionals, above all teachers, and the extraordinarily low percentages of blue-collar workers. Variation among art forms was relatively minor, with two exceptions. First, museums reported a less heavily professional public than the live performing arts. Second, blue-collar workers composed a far higher percentage of visitors in museums other than art than they did in any other category. Several other findings are also notable. Managers were slightly overrepresented relative to their share of the population in performing arts audiences but not among museum visitors. Clerical/sales personnel were statistically somewhat underrepresented in audiences for all the art forms, as were homemakers. Students were greatly overrepresented relative to their proportion of the public at large, although their participation varied considerably from audience to audience, and the retired and unemployed composed consistently small percentages of audiences for all art forms.

Income

The notion that the audience for the arts is composed of an economic elite is a familiar one. A study of the Minneapolis Symphony (#65) describes the popular stereotype of the symphony audience as one of "extreme wealth, snobbery, 'our orchestra,' and long gowns and white ties and tails." While snobbery and long gowns have not yet been quantified, surveys have repeatedly reported that museum and live performing arts audiences have considerably higher median incomes than the population at large. Baumol and Bowen (#8) found that the median family income of the performing arts audience was roughly twice as high as the median for the total urban population, and the NRCA (#137) reported that people with household incomes over $15,000 attended the arts more than twice as often as those with incomes below this figure.

The relative affluence of the arts audience has become an increasingly important issue as arts organizations have sought government support. Some observers have warned that it is difficult to justify public funding of the arts if the audience is composed of a small, well-to-do segment of the population. Where this attitude prevails audience income statistics may not prove particularly valuable for soliciting public backing. They will likely be more useful for internal administrative considerations, such as estimating the price sensitivity of the present audience, the level of contributions the audience is capable of giving, and the participation of various income groups in the audience. At any rate, it must be kept in mind that although income may be associated with arts attendance, it is not necessarily the cause of attendance. High income is correlated with having received a higher education and holding professional or managerial occupations, and evidence suggests that it is these latter factors rather than income that determine attendance. When all three factors are taken into account at the same time, education and occupation once controlled predict attendance but income does not (#115; Gruenberg, 1975). Thus, the underrepresentation of middle and low income groups is less the result of their lower disposable income than of their lower education and attainment and their membership in less prestigious occupations.

Income distribution data were available on eighty-eight audiences for museums and the live performing arts. Two steps were necessary to make the data comparable. First, virtually all studies reported income statistics by indicating the proportions of the respondents falling in various income ranges. For comparability, these range figures were converted to median incomes for each audience. Second, since the studies analyzed were conducted over a fifteen-year period, it was necessary to convert income figures into constant income levels. Accordingly, the consumer price index was used to transform all medians into constant mid-1976 dollars.

Several additional problems should be kept in mind when interpreting these income figures. Personal income is generally regarded as sensitive information, and income data solicited through questionnaires or interviews is more prone to distortion than any other social characteristic considered here (the nonresponse rate for income questions ranged as high as 29 percent). Moreover, some studies requested family income, others sought household income, and still others failed to specify either (which in some instances was probably interpreted as a request for individual income). This may introduce some downward bias. While studies requesting household and family income yielded nearly identical median incomes, surveys specifying neither obtained median incomes which were on the average $2,591 below those eliciting household income. No reliable procedure was available for adjusting these differences.

Finally, median real family incomes for the population as a whole increased considerably in the 1960s and modestly in the 1970s; median family income in constant 1976 dollars was $10,778 in 1960, $14,431 in 1970, and $14,476 in 1975. An audience with a median family income of $14,500 in 1976 dollars would be considered relatively affluent were the study conducted in 1960 but fairly representative of the public were the survey completed in 1975. More than two thirds of the studies reporting income data were conducted during the 1970s, and thus a figure of approximately $14,000 for median family income serves as a useful baseline for comparison with study findings.

Median Family Income,
U. S. Population

1960	$10,778
1970	14,431
1975	14,476

Consistent with the belief that the performing arts draw an upper-income audience, the median income for seventy performing arts audiences was $18,983, approximately $5,000 above that of the entire public (Table 6). Moreover, eighteen of the performing arts surveys were conducted by the Institute of Outdoor Drama. The outdoor dramas tended to attract a more diverse audience, and the median income for these studies was $15,249. By contrast, the median income for the performing arts studies without the surveys of outdoor drama was $20,250.

The gap we found between the population income and performing arts audience income was somewhat less than that observed by Baumol and Bowen (1966), probably reflecting the greater diversity of audiences surveyed in the studies reviewed here. Baumol and Bowen, for instance, did not include as many university or outdoor performances in their study, and the lowest median incomes consistently are reported for these types of audiences.

The performing arts studies reported a range of median audience incomes that indicated considerable diversity in audience composition from event to event. Nonetheless, nearly all of the assembled studies found median incomes above that of the general population. Excluding the eighteen outdoor drama surveys, only three of twenty-seven studies of theatre audiences reported median incomes below that of the public at large, and all three of these were of university theatre productions. No study of the other performing arts yielded median incomes below that of the general population. The minimum median incomes reported for ballet, orchestral music, and opera were, respectively, about $2,000, $4,000, and $5,000 higher than the population median. If outdoor drama audiences are excluded, the major performing art forms appear to draw markedly similar audiences: the theatre median is $19,342 and the opera median is $21,024, with ballet and orchestral music in between.

As has been previously observed in the case of both education and occupation, museums attract a somewhat more representative cross section of the American public. The eighteen museum studies reported incomes several thousand dollars below the performing arts average though still also several thousand dollars above the general population figure. (Only a single museum study found a median income below that of the general public.) Among the many factors that may account for this difference are the generally lower admissions charged by museums and the greater appeal of museums for students and young people. Though relatively few studies are available on the separate museum types, as in the cases of occupation and education, art museums were found to draw a somewhat more affluent clientele than science or history museums.

Race and Ethnicity

The relative paucity of blacks and other racial and ethnic minorities in arts audiences has been commented on frequently and, indeed, has been a matter of some concern to the arts community. In 1972, the American Association of Museums called attention to the problem of making museums relevant and hospitable to intercity and minority people, noting that the movements of the middle class to the suburbs and of blacks, Mexican-Americans, and Puerto Ricans to the core city "have left the museum, an urban institution, to some extent a beached whale...." (American Association of Museums, 1972: 6). Museums have not been alone in recognizing this dilemma. Recently, the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts formed a special committee to find out why so few of Washington's many black residents were attending the Center's events.

Table 6 Median Income of Audiences by Art Form

Art Form	Median of Median Incomes[1]	Range of Median Incomes	Total Number of Studies
All museums	$17,158	$13,394-$30,618	18
Art museums	18,148	14,016- 30,618	10
History museums	16,757	13,394- 29,055	3
Science museums	17,269	14,765- 20,851	5
All performing arts	18,903	9,466- 28,027	70
Ballet and dance	20,082	16,452- 22,404	10
Theatre			
Excluding outdoor drama	19,342	9,469- 25,784	27
Including outdoor drama	16,819	9,466- 25,784	45
Orchestra	20,825	18,221- 28,027	11
Opera	21,024	19,017- 27,245	5

[1] In constant mid-1976 dollars

Minorities--blacks and persons of Oriental and Hispanic background--were underrepresented in most of the audiences for which data on race were acquired. They accounted for a median 7 percent of thirty-five audiences as opposed to being over 20 percent of the population as a whole. The median percentage of minorities for thirteen audiences of the performing arts was 7, the same as it was for eleven audiences of art museum visitors. Again, museums other than art were more inclusive: for eleven sets of such visitors the median percentage of minorities was 11. As to specific minorities, while blacks constituted 12.3 percent of the total urban population in 1970, they represented a median 3.0 percent of the fifteen arts audiences for which data were available. In a number of studies outside the West Coast and Southwest, individuals of Hispanic background were not separated from the white population, thus depressing the minority total. We surmise, however, from the few studies in these areas that did count Hispanic people separately, that they generally made up a small percentage of the audience and that their exclusion depresses the minority median by no more than 1 percent.

Such overall figures should be interpreted cautiously because of the small number of audiences studied, variations in the definition of minority and, above all, the large differences in the populations of minority groups in different locales. The set of studies reviewed here, for example, contains data from the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area, where blacks composed 24.6 percent of the population in 1970 and from Washington State, where only one in fifty persons was black. Similarly, persons of Hispanic origin represented a substantial portion of the populations of Los Angeles and New York City (15.0 and 11.1 percent, respectively), but were a much less significant presence in such places as Boston or Montgomery, Alabama. For this reason, selected comparisons are useful.

In all but one of fourteen audiences for which data on black attenders can be compared to census data, blacks were underrepresented relative to their numbers in the local population by ratios of up to eighteen-to-one. In five studies of museums in the San Francisco area, where blacks composed 10.6 percent of the metropolitan population in 1970, the highest black proportion was only 3 percent (#111, #193, #194, #195, #265). In two New York City audiences (#94 and #203), blacks represented 3 and 4 percent of attenders in contrast to over 16 percent of the metropolitan population. In two studies of attendance at two of the Smithsonian museums (#110 and #265), visitors were 9 and 5 percent black.

Data on audiences in the South differed little from other sections of the country. In Joffrey Ballet audiences in three southern cities, blacks were underrepresented in audiences by ratios of from three-to-one to thirteen-to-one (#38) relative to their share of local metropolitan populations. "Nonwhites" (presumably almost all blacks) composed a rather sizeable 19 percent of visitors to a Montgomery, Alabama, art museum; but the metropolitan black population in that area is 34.4 percent. Only among summer visitors of a Boston art museum (#17) were blacks represented in proportion to their number in the metropolitan population at large. Finally, nonwhites constituted a relatively high 16 percent of New York City theatregoers in one study (#73).

It should be noted that for many institutions a large portion of the visitor population consists of tourists from outside the relevant Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area (SMSA). Out-of-town visitors have been found to compose between 22 and 30 percent of visitors to the Metropolitan Museum in New York (#3, #16), between 12 and 55 percent of visitors to New York's Whitney Museum and the Museum of Modern Art, and between 2 and 10 percent of visitors to museums in Newark and Brooklyn (#16). (These figures vary by day of week.) Percentages of out-of-SMSA visitors to Baltimore museums and performing arts institutions range from 2 to 14 percent (Cwi and Lyall, 1977). A strict comparison would have to take these figures into account.

Individuals of Hispanic origin appear to have similarly low participation rates, although here the pattern is less clear. They ranged from 0.8 to 3.2 percent of four sets of San Francisco museum visitors, while they constituted 7.4 percent of the metropolitan population. Only 8 percent of the San Antonio Joffrey audience (#138) and 5 percent of American Museum of Natural History visitors (#203) were found to be Hispanic, but 37.5 and 11.1 percent of San Antonio and New York City residents, respectively were of Hispanic origin in 1970. The most anomalous findings on Hispanic attendance appeared in a survey in Washington State (#63), where Hispanic people composed from 5 percent of dance audiences to 12 percent of history museum visitors even though less than 2 percent of the state's population is of Hispanic origin. If the findings are not the result of unique methodological aspects of the study, the high rate of Hispanic arts attendance in Washington State is remarkable indeed and deserves further study.

Information about minority attendance habits can also be gleaned from six cross-sectional studies undertaken by the National Research Center of the Arts. These surveys--two national, one of New York State, one of California, one of Winston-Salem, North Carolina, and one of the New York Borough of Queens--asked respondents if they had attended each of several kinds of arts performances and museums in the previous twelve months. Relative responses of whites and nonwhites varied widely from place to place and time to time. In New York State, virtually equal percentages of whites and nonwhites reported attendance in every category except "concert or opera," where 36 percent of whites had attended as compared to 23 percent of nonwhites. In Queens, slightly higher percentages of whites said they attended theatre and classical music performances, but slightly more nonwhites attended dance (#190). In Winston-Salem a higher percentage of whites than nonwhites reported attending all the performing arts (#201). In California white attendance was higher than black and Hispanic attendance for theatre, classical music, art museums, and science and natural history museums, but a substantially higher percentage of blacks reported attendance at dance events. Hispanic respondents indicated less attendance than blacks or whites at all the performing arts, but reported attending museums more than blacks (#42). Consistent with the California results, a cross-sectional survey of the attitudes of Amarillo residents found black respondents relatively more enthusiastic about classical music and Hispanic respondents preferring the visual arts to theatre, classical music, or dance.

The two national surveys are rather perplexing for although the second was a replication of the first and found rather similar rates of attendance among whites, attendance by nonwhites was sharply lower in the second. The first survey, undertaken in 1973, showed roughly equal attendance at all the arts except for theatre, where more whites reported attendance, and dance, where greater attendance was reported by nonwhites (#7). In the 1975 replication, however, white attendance substantially exceeds nonwhite in every category, with nonwhite attendance dropping from 48 to 18 percent for science and natural history museums, from 50 to 24 percent for art museums, and from 44 to 23 percent for theatre (#137).

Although most of the cross-sectional surveys do show relatively small disparities between the attendance behavior of whites and minorities, their findings must be interpreted cautiously. Information based on people's recollection is obviously considerably less reliable than information obtained from people at actual arts events, and cross-sectional study respondents may often define attendance in idiosyncratic ways. The results of these and other differences can be seen when the findings of a cross-sectional study of New York State residents is compared with the results of a statewide New York survey of individuals actually attending arts performances. Although nonwhites reported slightly higher attendance rates than whites for theatre, ballet and dance, and museums in the cross-sectional survey, nonwhites were consistently underrepresented in the actual audiences. This underrepresentation may reflect greater overreporting by nonwhite respondents; peculiarities of sampling; disproportionate attendance by nonwhites at events excluded from the actual audience surveys; a tendency for many whites to attend frequently while many nonwhites attend only once or twice a year; or some combination of the above.

While the existing data does not permit a definitive assessment--for example, no surveys of museums or performing arts companies appealing predominantly to minority group members were available--it seems likely that blacks and other minorities are generally underrepresented in performing arts audiences and among museum visitors relative to their share of the population. Since a higher percentage of minorities than whites are very young, poor, without college educactions, and/or employed in blue-collar or service occupations--all categories with disproportionately low participation in arts audiences--this is not in itself surprising. In 1975, 34.4 percent of the black population, and only 26.1 percent of the white population, was under the age of sixteen. The median income for white families in 1975 was $14,268 compared to a median of $8,779 for black families. Similarly, 63.2 percent of black civilian employed persons were blue-collar or service workers as compared to 44.3 percent for whites. And the average black person twenty-five years of age or older had completed 10.9 years of schooling compared to a white median of 12.4. Although existing data do not permit an assessment, it is likely that poverty and lack of education, rather than cultural factors or racial exclusion, are responsible for the low level of minority arts attendance. Only one audience or visitor study (#193) reported educational attainment by race. This study found that the percentage of black visitors who were college graduates was even higher (by a few percentage points) than the comparable figure for white college graduate visitors. Where data permits, further analysis should be performed to assess attendance rates by whites, blacks, and Hispanic persons of equal educational attainment and comparable occupational and income levels.

Summary of Demographics

The studies in our sample indicate consistently that the audience for the arts is more highly educated, is of higher occupational status, and has a higher income than the population as a whole. Only one study out of ninety-seven found that the proportion of the audience with a college education was lower than the population at large. Every one of the sixty-five studies which reported occupation found that the audience was composed of a substantially greater proportion of professionals than the general population, and only four of seventy-six studies found that the median income of the audience was lower than the median income of the population at large.

Although women were slightly overrepresented in the arts audience, the gender ratio varied extensively and one-quarter of the performing arts audiences in our sample and two-fifths of the museum visitor populations were composed of more men than women. The median age of the arts audience was close to the median age of the population at large but varied widely from audience to audience. The few studies which examined the racial or ethnic composition of audiences indicate that minorities were present in proportions smaller than their share of relevant metropolitan populations.

All of the variables studied showed considerable change from audience to audience. Some of this can be attributed to the differing methodologies, such as response categories, methods of sampling, and presentation of results. Some may stem from changes within an audience. Certain characteristics of audiences were found to vary by season, time of performance (day of week, time of day), and the particular content of the performance or exhibit. One final source of variation is that the composition of the audience appears to differ slightly for different art forms.

Museum visitor populations were somewhat more representative of the American public than were the performing arts audiences surveyed. The museum surveys found smaller proportions of professionals and the well educated had lower median incomes than did studies of performing arts audiences. The differences found between the museum visitor population and performing arts audiences may be attributable in part to the lower median age of the museum visitor. There were differences between the visitors to the various kinds of museums. The art museum visitor population was better educated, wealthier, older, and composed of more professionals than visitors to history, science, or other museums. Among the performing arts, theatre audiences were somewhat less educated and less wealthy, and they were composed of a smaller proportion of professionals than audiences for the other performing art forms.

ADDITIONAL ISSUES IN AUDIENCE RESEARCH

In this section we look at changes in the composition of arts audiences over time to determine if the "reach" of museums and the live performing arts has become broader, narrower, or remained the same. Also, we explore the differences between frequent attenders and infrequent attenders and evaluate the evidence on audience overlap among art forms: to what extent does each art form have its own devoted following and to what extent is it correct to speak of one arts audience? Finally, we examine two important genres of audience research that do not deal with demographic composition. These are studies of the economic impact of spending by arts audiences on local economies and surveys of public attitudes towards government funding of the arts.

The Arts Audience Over Time

To examine whether the American audiences for live performing arts have been progressively democratized over the past seventeen years, we have evaluated trends in five major indicators--gender, age, education, occupation, and income. During certain years, particularly some in the 1960s, we had few surveys to work from. Some of these have been grouped together in a span of several years to provide a more stable estimate of audience composition. At least six are included within each time period (with the exception of one period for the data on education). Furthermore, because of the relatively small number of museum studies available for some of the periods, the analysis is limited to performing arts studies only. It should be cautioned that the pre-1965 studies include a number conducted by Baumol and Bowen (between eight and thirteen, depending on the social characteristic). As we have already noted, these studies yielded social profiles that were significantly more elite than those found by most other audience surveys. Since relatively few other early studies are available, these surveys dominate the early and mid-1960s audience composition figures, and this should be kept in mind in examining trends based on this period.

Gender. The proportion of men in the performing arts audience shows little change over time, though there is a slight drop in recent years (Table 7). In most periods, the percentage of men varies from the low 30s to the low 50s, indicating that there is far more variation in gender composition from event to event than between time periods.

Age. There is no indication of any trend toward younger audiences.

Education. The proportion of the performing arts audience with at least a college education evidences no decline over time. While the education level appears to fluctuate considerably between the first three time periods, much if not most of the change reflects special features of the studies conducted during these periods. Thirteen of fourteen pre-1967 studies were executed by Baumol and Bowen, while seven of fifteen studies during the 1967-1972 period were conducted on audiences of university productions. (None of the post-1972 studies were of campus audiences.)

Occupation. Combining two indices of the occupational composition of performing arts audiences--the percentages of professional workers and blue-collar workers--we see little change over the past seventeen years.

Income. Income trends mirror those reported for the other social indicators. The average income for 1960-1967 was recorded at a figure markedly higher (in constant mid-1976 dollars), but again this is based almost entirely on the Baumol and Bowen surveys of prominent performing arts audiences. It is notable that the median incomes reported for audience studies conducted within a time period vary far more than do the averages between the periods.

In short, our data do not reveal any striking changes in the composition of the audience over the past one and one-half decades. However, we caution that the heterogeneity of the audience studies evaluated here may have concealed subtler trends. For example, if audiences for one art form were becoming increasingly male while audiences for another more female, such a change would not be discernable in our data. Similarly, if theatre audiences in major cities were becoming more diverse, while theatre audiences in smaller cities and suburbs were becoming less so, no change would be observed. Moreover, any changes in the audience of particular organizations or sectors would not be reflected in the aggregate figures we have considered. It is possible, for instance, that the audience for professional dance companies--or any other art form--is undergoing a significant broadening while the audience for certain other arts forms is remaining stable or even narrowing.

Another way to examine time trends, and one which eliminates problems emanating from the aggregation of studies of diverse institutions, is to compare studies of the same arts organization which have been conducted at different times. In twenty-nine cases we have multiple studies of an organization's audience. However, the research methodologies were usually so different and the idea of time-series data so absent among the studies that a meaningful comparison could be made in too few instances.

Audience Structure

In most audience studies attention is rarely directed at one particularly critical difference among audience members: frequency of attendance. Some persons are veterans of many performances

Table 7

Time Trends in the Gender, Age, Education, Occupation, and Income Composition of Performing Arts Audiences

Social Character and Time Period	Median of Medians	Range of Medians	Total Number of Studies
Gender: Percent Men			
1960-65	56	45-58	10
1966-69	46	32-54	7
1970-71	42	36-51	11
1972-73	45	33-54	11
1974-75	37	35-43	9
1976	39	34-54	13
Age: Median (in years)			
1960-67	37	33-45	9
1968-70	36	24-46	6
1971-72	41	34-42	8
1973	30	21-35	11
1974	36	22-43	8
1975	38	29-48	12
1976	33	21-45	18
Education: Percent with College Degree or More			
1960-66	72	61-86	14
1967-72	47	21-66	15
1973	63	55-65	6
1974	67	54-74	4
1975	57	48-65	7
1976	65	34-76	13

(Table 7 continues on following page)

(Table 7 continued)

Occupation:			
Percent professional			
1960-69	65	48-80	11
1970-74	57	50-63	10
1975-76	59	24-73	20
Percent blue-collar workers			
1960-69	2.4	1-5	8
1970-74	2.8	0-5	14
1975-76	3.0	1-7	11
Income: 1976 Dollars			
1960-67	23,407	19,342-28,027	11
1967-70	19,017	16,819-25,229	10
1971-73	19,684	9,466-27,245	12
1974-75	18,983	15,292-23,202	7
1976	20,004	14,003-21,004	11

or visits, others rarely visit, and still others are in the audience for the first time. (Some are also there for the last time.) A national cross-sectional survey in 1975 reports that 47 percent of the public had attended at least one theatre, classical music, or dance performance during the previous twelve months: 52 percent had visited a museum. Of the performing arts consumers, 62 percent had made one to five visits, while 38 percent had gone even more often; of the museum visitors, 58 percent went to the museum five times or fewer, while 42 percent had visited more frequently (#137). Most audiences contain a mixture of regular and irregular arts consumers, and for some purposes defining the relative proportions is useful.

Growing total attendance can reflect an increase in the number of individuals drawn to the arts, an increase in the frequency of visits, or both. One organization experienced in audience research distinguishes between the "reach" and "frequency" of an audience. Reach describes the percentage of a community which attends an arts institution at least once during a one-year period, while frequency is the average number of visits made by attenders during the year (Morison and Fliehr, 1974). The ratio of reach to frequency can vary considerably from audience to audience. For instance, in one study of a park and a theatre in the park, it was found that the park's reach was 6.0 percent (6 percent of the area residents had visited the park during the past year), while the theatre's reach was only 2.5 percent (#118). On the other hand, the frequency of the park visitor was 4.4 (of those ever attending during the previous year, each averaged a little more than four visits), but the frequency for the theatre patron was 5.4. In other words, the theatre attracted a smaller number of individuals than the park, but it was a more committed clientele.

Reach is a good measure of an organization's breadth of appeal, while frequency signifies the extent to which the organization has cultivated a regular constituency. Though outreach programs are usually aimed at increasing the former, some may actually be affecting the latter. One art museum developed a special exhibit designed, in part, to broaden the museum's appeal. However, a visitor study revealed that although attendance did significantly increase during the exhibit, much of the expansion was due to the return of regular visitors rather than the appearance of new visitors (#135).

Studies involving more than a single type of arts organization typically reveal that frequent attenders of one type of institution also tend to be frequent attenders of other institutions. An analysis of cultural consumers in California reveals that of infrequent museum visitors (one to five visits during the previous year), 47 percent had not attended a theatre, classical music, or dance performance over the previous year and only 19 percent had attended more than five times. By contrast, of frequent museum visitors (more than five times per year), only 24 percent failed to attend one of these performing arts and 47 percent had gone to more than five performances over the year (#42). There is even some evidence that frequent arts attenders participate more heavily in all leisure pursuits, such as sporting events, movies, the circus, and creative activities (#'s 7, 39, 42, 190, 203). The habits of attenders of one art form differ from those in another. One study found, for instance, that 63 percent of respondents who had been to the theatre during a twelve-month period had attended no other type of performing arts event. By contrast, only 36 percent of the audience at the symphony, 25 percent at the opera, and 20 percent of the ballet had failed to attend at least one other type of performing arts event in the past year (#115). There are various ways of measuring audience overlap, but however approached, the results seem to indicate that theatre audiences are the least integrated with those of the other performing arts (#'s 8, 115). Also, there is some evidence that slightly different types of people frequent performing arts events as compared to museums (#42).

Arts audiences distribute themselves along a continuum. Clustered at one end are those who frequently attend a variety of arts events, and at the other end are those who only occasionally sample a single event. The habitual attenders group themselves in active social circles. Friendship and acquaintanceships are formed around a shared interest in the arts, cultural events are central topics of informal discussion and exchange, and there is the expectation that attendance at, and knowledgeability of, the arts is high. Several studies report that frequent attenders are more likely than infrequent ones to hear about arts events through their social networks, to count cultural consumers among their friends, and to indicate that arts attendance is fashionable in their social milieu (#'s 7, 42, 64, 93).

This cluster of the arts audience is also distinguished from the occasional attenders by its social character. Sixteen audience studies in our possession examined the relationship between frequency of attendance and education, and all sixteen found that regular visitors are more highly educated than irregular visitors for both museums and the performing arts. A cross-sectional study of Californians, for example, found that of those who had not visited a museum during the past year, 7 percent held a college degree or more; of the infrequent museum visitors (one to five times), 18 percent were college educated; and of the frequent visitors (more than five times), 31 percent held college degrees. The corresponding figures for the performing arts were 7, 18, and 43 percent, respectively (#42).

Those among the regular arts audience also tend to have higher incomes, though the evidence here is less clear-cut than for education. Thirteen of seventeen studies with relevant data report higher incomes for frequent attenders than for infrequent attenders, but one study revealed no difference and three indicated the reverse. In all three of the latter cases, the audiences were for ballet or dance. For example, a study that included ballet audiences in New York State found that median income for frequent attenders was $19,000, as compared to $19,400 for infrequent attenders (#73).

There is some evidence that income may have a stronger relationship to frequency of attendance for the performing arts than for museums. In one cross-sectional study, for example, the income gap between frequent and infrequent attenders is $2,900 for the performing arts but only $800 for museums (#42). Although museum admission charges typically are cheaper than performing arts tickets or are nonexistent, we suspect this explains little of the difference in attender background. Studies of visitors to museums before and after the institution of an admissions charge (Cameron and Abbey, 1962) or studies comparing "free" periods to times when admissions fees are charged (#17) have found little variation. Then, too, professional sports and rock concerts impose admissions fees comparable to those for the performing arts, yet such events, we suggest, often attract a considerably less "upscale" audience.

There was no decisive pattern for the gender and age composition of frequent versus infrequent visitors. Four studies indicated that frequent attenders had a higher proportion of men, six studies reported a lower proportion of men, and two studies found no difference. Similarly, six studies concluded that frequent attenders were older than infrequent visitors, three found the opposite, and two reported no age difference.

Since frequent attenders are more likely to be present in an audience for a specific performance or to be museum visitors on any given day, most audience studies are, strictly speaking, studies of those present rather than of visitors. As we have seen, regular arts consumers are generally more highly educated and somewhat wealthier than irregular consumers. Thus social statistics based on those present will tend to reveal a somewhat more affluent profile than if the statistics were based on all those who ever participate in arts audiences.

Economic and Political Impact

The precarious financial condition faced by many arts organizations and the growth of government interest in the arts have led to an intensified search for ways of justifying public support. Increasingly, audience research has provided the factual platform upon which rationales for public support of the arts have been erected.

Audience surveys may prove of practical value for promoting public support in several ways. Social profiles can be used to demonstrate that a broad cross section of the public is being reached by an arts organization and that, by implication, the organization is performing a valuable quasi-public service. Another application of audience research to the acquisition of public backing is in the identification of secondary economic benefits of arts institutions for the local community. A third practical use is in demonstrating the educational value of exhibits and performances for attenders, thereby showing that the arts serve public education. Finally, attitude surveys of cross sections of the public can be used to document widespread support for the arts, so that spending on the arts by funding agencies and legislative bodies is made politically legitimate.

While demographic profiles have been acquired in virtually all audience studies, few have examined the secondary economic impact or the public appeal of the arts. Our assessment of attitudinal and economic studies, then, rests on a more tenuous base than our assessment of the far more extensively researched social profile questions.

Economic impact. Studies of the local economic impact of the arts have not solely relied on audience survey methodologies. The direct and indirect consequences of an arts organization's payroll and purchases have been examined; efforts have been made to identify the largely uncompensated contributions of arts organizations to schools and other local institutions; and the effects of cultural resources on individual business firm decisions to locate in a community have been considered (see, for instance, #139; Arts Education and American Panel, 1977; and Cwi and Lyall, 1977).

Audience research is particularly well suited to answering still other types of economic impact questions: Are art institutions an important consideration in the decision of nonresidents to visit a city? How large are the nonarts expenditures during a visit to an arts institution? What sectors typically benefit from the infusion of the associated expenditures?

Nine audience studies in our possession, all except one conducted in the mid-1970s, addressed one or more of these issues. One study was based on a survey of a Boston commerical theater audience (#4); a second was a survey of New York commercial theater audiences (#37); another involved a study of visitors to the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art (#3); a fourth consisted of a survey of fourteen audiences of nonprofit performing arts events in Wisconsin (#29); a fifth and sixth were of performing arts and museum visitors in New York State (#73) and Washington State (#63); the seventh was based on a survey of visitors to seven major Chicago museums (#11); and two more were surveys of audiences for a ballet company (#94, #138).

There is no effective way of measuring how cultural institutions draw visitors to a community. As a result, these studies have relied on a technique which yields suggestive but not definitive information on this matter. Art organization visitors are simply asked whether the presence of the institution was a major factor in their decision to visit the city. Thus, among the nonresident visitors to the Metropolitan Museum of Art (nonresidents comprised half of all visitors), four-fifths reported that they had planned to see the museum prior to their arrival in New York City. And of these, 24 percent indicated that their intention to see the museum was "a fairly important" reason for the trip and 58 percent affirmed that the visit was "a major" reason behind the trip. Comparable levels of museum drawing power were found in the Chicago study. Nonresidents were asked: "Was a visit to the museum or museums an important reason for your trip to the city?" Nearly 50 percent indicated it was the "main reason," and 85 percent attributed at least some importance to the seven museums in stimulating their travel plans. The number of city visitors who would not have come were the museums unavailable cannot be fixed with any precision using these figures, but it is clear that a substantial proportion are attracted to the city largely as "cultural tourists." Since cultural consumers tend to be highly affluent, the arts may be particularly effective in attracting those who are most likely to make substantial personal expenditures during their visit to the metropolitan area.

The expenditures by visitors on nonarts goods and services varied considerably. Patrons of the Boston theatre spent $6.40 on the average; in several cities, between $5.00 and $14.00 were spent aside from the performance by persons attending ballet; New York State residents who attended arts events spent an average $7.80 on nonarts activities while out-of-town patrons spent $14.30; Washington residents spent $6.70 along with attending a performing arts event; Wisconsin performing arts audience spent $1.90 per person in attending one of fourteen surveyed events but $15.80 in attending another; out-of-town visitors to Chicago museums spent $16.00 on the average; and out-of-town visitors to the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art typically disposed of $85.00 (a median figure).

If these amounts are used to estimate total annual expenditures, the direct aggregate impact on the local economy is considerable. In Boston, visitors of the single theatre alone contributed $3.9 million to the local nonarts economy during one season and $6.6 million during another season when attendance rates were higher (nonresidents were not distinguished from residents in this study, so only a fraction of these totals represents the infusion of outside capital). In Chicago, out-of-town visitors of the seven museums contributed $76.5 million to the economy, and in New York nonresidents passing through a single museum were responsible for approximately $187 million in expenditures annually. These figures represent direct outlays, and there are additional indirect economic benefits as the money changes hands several times before entering savings or tax accounts. A multiplier of two is often used to estimate the recycling effects, and so the combined direct and indirect economic impact may be as much as double the above figures.

Not surprisingly, virtually all of the spending is concentrated in the usual tourist industries. For instance, in the Chicago study (#11) of the total museum related expenditures 29 percent went to restaurants, 27 percent retail stores, 21 percent lodging, and 9 percent transportation. Thus, it is evident that certain sectors of the local economy benefit considerably from purchases by cultural tourists. It remains to be demonstrated that the whole economy, the municipal government, and the local public also benefit from this sectoral economic impact. It has not been shown that the benefits outweigh any additional tax burden borne by local residents resulting from government underwriting of art organization deficits. Also, it has not been shown that most of the money spent on activities associated with attending arts events would not have been spent in the absence of such events. Still another important issue which has yet to be addressed empirically is the local economic impact of public sponsorship of the arts relative to government investment in other areas or institutions.

Political impact. Although the economic benefits have not yet been decisively demonstrated, it appears that public support for government subsidy is already widespread. This conclusion emerges from ten studies we have assembled on public attitudes toward government underwriting of the arts. Eight of the studies are cross-sectional surveys of the public (including two national studies), and the other two are of performing arts and museum visitors in two states. Nine of the studies have been conducted since 1973, and the tenth was done in 1970. Seven of the inquiries were carried out by a single organization--the National Research Center of the Arts. (#'s 7, 42, 63, 73, 93, 137, and 201; the others are #'s 62, 66, and 187).

Within certain regions of America, majorities or near majorities endorse the general principle that the government should help finance cultural organizations that are running deficits, with local help clearly preferred over federal. Among California residents, for instance, 49 percent subscribe to the position that the federal government "should help arts and cultural organizations in the area if they need financial support"; 60 percent endorse state government backing in this circumstance; and 63 percent back local government intervention (#42). Comparable patterns are recorded for Winston-Salem, North Carolina, (#201) and Anchorage, Alaska, (#93): the percentages supporting federal, state, and local government financing are 49, 60, and 64 in the former region and 47, 69, and 74 in the latter. In Boston, more than half (57 percent) of the city's residents favored expansion of a city-sponsored cultural program from a summer season to a year-round basis (#62). And in Salt Lake City, Utah, a majority of the public (58 percent) would urge a greater allocation of the municipal budget to cultural events (#166).

The apparently high levels of public support in these regions may be due to the question-sensitive nature of this issue (though conceivably there could be regional pockets of high support for government involvement). When a national sample of the American public was asked in 1973 whether "cultural organizations (should) have to pay their own way, or should....be able to receive direct government funds to help support them," only 38 percent adopted the latter position, while 34 percent indicated that cultural organizations should rely on their own means and 28 percent reported that it depended on the circumstances or were undecided (#76). Even greater skepticism is evident when the issue is government support for artists rather than cultural organizations. Only 31 percent of the California public agreed that "professional artists should receive help from (the) California state government if they need financial assistance to continue their artistic profession" (#42), and in 1975 only 29 percent of the American public endorsed federal support for needy artists (31 percent endorsed support by state or local government) (#137).

The level of public support for intervention varies widely according to the specific type of cultural organization involved, with museums faring far better than specific kinds of performing arts organizations. Thus, while 38 percent of the general public in a 1973 survey agreed with the principle that "cultural organizations such as museums and symphony orchestras" should be eligible for government underwriting, far smaller proportions urged such eligibility for specific kinds of performing arts organizations. Only 11 percent of the public would like to see opera receive public funds; the percentages for commercial theatre, nonprofit theatre, ballet and dance, and symphony orchestras stood at only 5, 12, 11, and 16, respectively. By contrast government subsidies for museums drew far greater support. The percentages endorsing government support for art, science, and history museums were 41, 55, and 57, respectively (#7).

There is some indication that the level of support has grown in recent years as government spending on behalf of cultural organizations has itself expanded. In a 1975 survey of the general American public, the percentages accepting the idea of local government support for opera had increased to 33 percent, for theatre to 38 percent, for ballet and dance to 33 percent, and for symphony orchestra to 37 percent. Similarly, subsidies for art, science, and history museums were now supported by 46, 64, and 64 percent of the public, respectively (#137).

The rank order of the level of public support for the various art forms closely parallels the degree to which the forms attract a socially elite audience. The more representative an art audience is of the general public, the more widespread is public support for government financing of the art form. This is hardly surprising, for one would expect interest in government support for the arts to correspond to the benefits perceived. Among those attending performing arts events and museums in the states of Washington and New York, over 80 percent felt that government assistance should be provided performing arts organizations and over 90 percent felt that it should go to museums (#63; #73). Similarly, in cross-sectional surveys two of the best predictors of individual willingness to endorse government involvement are the individual's educational level (already shown to be one of the best indicators of arts attendance) and whether the individual is an active arts consumer. In the 1973 national survey, 22 percent of those with an eighth-grade education agreed that the government should support cultural organizations, while 50 percent of the college educated took this position. Twenty percent of the nonattenders but 64 percent of the frequent attenders (those in the top decile of the attendance rate) shared the view that government subsidies for the arts were desirable (#7).

While large segments of the public agree in principle that government support for the arts is appropriate, it is less clear that these segments would give the arts a high priority were they confronted with concrete political choices. Some evidence indicates that a substantial part of the public is prepared to have the government intervene in at least a very modest fashion. In Anchorage, for instance, 71 percent of the residents assert that they would be willing to pay an additional five dollars in local taxes to support community cultural activities (#201); 54 percent are so inclined in California (#42), and 58 percent of the 1975 national population would be willing to undertake this nominal payment (#137). A fivefold increase in the tax burden, however, results in many fewer supporters: 20 percent of the California respondents and 41 percent nationally would support a twenty-five dollar increase in their taxes to underwrite the arts (#42; #137). Again, willingness to undertake this burden is highly correlated with whether the individual is a cultural consumer. However, it is also clear that the arts still rank far below other priorities for most of the public. When a national sample was asked in 1975 to evaluate the importance of various community services, the arts rated below health, transportation, education, law enforcement, housing, and recreation facilities. Similarly, when asked whether federal spending should be increased in a number of areas, respondents ranked the arts far below education, health, public transportation, and housing, with only defense and welfare spending rated significantly less preferable than that of the arts (#137).

It is evident from available audience research, then, that strong minorities of the public (and in some cases majorities) are in agreement with the general principle that the government should be involved in funding cultural organizations, though there is less support for direct funding of artists themselves. Support is strongest among those segments who stand to benefit most directly from increased government backing. However, while these results are suggestive they cannot be used to determine whether this public support for the arts is--or could be--mobilized in the political process. We do not know, for example, whether the arts lobby has a more willing public to mobilize on behalf of art spending than do other interest groups on behalf of other, competing priorities. Nor do we know whether public attitudes toward government arts policies become translated into voter preferences during election campaigns.

CHAPTER 2

QUALITY AND IMPACT OF ARTS AUDIENCE STUDIES

Arts institutions and organizations concerned with the arts have already undertaken a great many studies of audiences, and the tempo of such research appears to be increasing. Arts managers and policy makers have studied audiences in order to assess public attitudes, to determine the composition of the public that particular institutions serve, to help decide on prices and hours, to provide baseline data for market development programs, and to estimate the impact of arts activities on local and state economies.

Such research has been greeted with a combination of skepticism and enthusiasm. An increasing segment of the arts community seems to feel that institutions "in need of practical advice miss a gold mine of wisdom by neglecting to survey their audiences" (Wainwright, 1973). Others assert that the research is of trivial importance, an expensive way of finding out what is already known.

Has audience research been of value to the arts? To answer this question we must ask two more in turn. First, has the technical quality of audience studies been sufficiently high to provide information that, if acted upon, will permit managers and policy makers to accurately predict the impact of their decisions? Second, has the research been planned in such a way that the individuals responsible will be willing and able to use its results? Research can be of the highest technical quality, but if it does not lead to recommendations that decision makers have power to implement, it will not be useful. Similarly, if research provides data directly relevant to pressing decisions but the research is shoddily executed, policy based on that research is more likely to have unfortunate consequences.

The purpose of this chapter is to discover those factors most closely related to technical quality and policy utility of arts audience research. Our strategy has been to rate the quality and utility of eighty-six studies of arts audiences and to ascertain the relationship between certain characteristics of the studies and their scores on the quality and utility scales. Organizations that consider sponsoring or undertaking audience research may use these findings as guidelines against which to measure their own assumptions about such issues as what kind of research to do, whether to do research in-house or contract out, what kind of researcher to hire, and how much to spend.

THE ARTS AUDIENCE SURVEY

Our discussion is based upon an intensive examination of eighty-six studies of arts audiences and on completed surveys from the directors of these studies. In addition to reports on museum visitors and performing arts audiences, we examined cross-sectional surveys of local or national populations designed to acquire information on exposure to and/or attitudes toward the arts. Most of the eighty-six studies employ traditional survey techniques, although some studies use quasi-experimental designs (Campbell and Stanley, 1966). They were undertaken to provide information for a variety of purposes, ranging from fund raising, audience expansion, and marketing to planning facilities, setting ticket prices, and lobbying legislatures.

We described our acquisition procedures in chapter one. Within three months, we had 127 audience studies which had been undertaken since 1970. Studies conducted before 1970 were excluded on the grounds that study directors would find it difficult to recall essential procedural details of their research. We estimate that at least 400 audience studies have been conducted since then and so the 127 located for this inquiry can be assumed to be reasonably representative. Some bias towards more recent studies and toward studies of above average quality and utility may have resulted from our procedures.

Two types of information were compiled. First, each study report was coded by two raters on a variety of quality dimensions. Second, a twelve-page survey form was sent to directors of 112 studies. (Fifteen study directors could not be located or were deceased.) After a second mailing and several telephone contacts, usable forms were received from eighty-six of the directors, for a response rate of 77 percent. The study audiences were distributed among the various art forms as follows:

Art Museums	21
History Museums	14
Science Museums	7
Ballet	12
Dance	6
Jazz	7
Folk and Ethnic Music	4
Chamber Music	10
Orchestras	17
Commercial Theatre	7
Nonprofit Theatre	32
Opera	11
Cross-sectional Studies	13

The total exceeds eighty-six because many studies surveyed audiences of more than one art form.

PREDICTING QUALITY IN ARTS AUDIENCE STUDIES

By technical quality we refer to the extent to which a study is properly conceptualized and executed in accordance with the norms of scientific investigation. Previous efforts to assess the technical quality of research have generally relied on generalized assessments by peers or specially trained reviewers (e.g., Persell, 1971; Gordon and Moris, 1975; Yin et al., 1976) or on itemized assessments in which raters, counting the number of specific procedures, generate a score on a quality index (e.g., Gephart, 1965; Bernstein and Freeman, 1975; Yin et al., 1976; McTavish et al., 1977). While there is merit in both methods, because of resource limitations only the latter is used here. Drawing on a number of standard discussions of preferred technical procedures in social research (e.g., Kerlinger, 1973; Bernstein, 1976; Campbell and Stanley, 1966; Lin, 1976), on an exhaustive list of seventy-five desirable technical research features developed by McTavish et al. (1977), and on observations of factors specifically relevant to arts audience research (Mann, 1972; O'Hare, 1974; Cameron and Abbey, 1960b), we established two sets of criteria for evaluating the quality of the eighty-six audience studies. The first set was used with the questionnaire which had been completed by the directors of the studies; the second set was employed by two raters who evaluated the reports available on each audience study.[1]

We divided the quality criteria into two domains. Following a distinction elaborated by Campbell and Stanley (1966) and by others (e.g., Bracht and Glass, 1968; Bernstein, 1976), these domains can be referred to as internal validity and external validity. Internal validity refers to the extent to which an investigator can eliminate alternative explanations as causes. External validity refers to the extent to which the researcher can generalize from the individuals studied to a larger population.

Internal validity of each survey is assessed using nine items on the investigator's questionnaire and ten items from the research report assessment. These items include whether the survey was pretested, trained personnel were used in the administration of the study, multivariate statistical techniques were employed, and a valid linkage was made between the survey's data and the conclusions drawn. External validity is assessed with ten items on the investigator's questionnaire and eight items in the report assessment dealing with such issues as sample selection, sample size, testing for response bias, and use of tests of statistical inference.[2] Each item was dichotomized into high- and low-quality categories. Quality scales were formed by summing the number of times an audience survey fell into the high-quality category.

While some of these items may appear esoteric, each can have a significant impact and offers the potential of distorting research findings. For example, imagine a situation in which poorly supervised theatre ushers are responsible for inserting survey forms in programs and placing them on every other seat: the usher responsible for the front of the house places the programs in the correct manner; the usher for the middle rows inserts the surveys properly but forgets to collect them; and the usher responsible for the rear falls ill at the last minute and is replaced by someone unfamiliar with the survey procedure who fails to distribute any questionnaires. The audience members in the front row seats dutifully fill out and return their forms and, when the program has finished, the researcher has a total response rate of about 30 percent. The researcher does not bother to check the representativeness of the seats from which completed forms were gathered. When the results are calculated, he or she is surprised to find that the crowd is older and more well-to-do than expected. If the theatre managers do not choose to ignore the survey findings, there is a danger here. They might launch an expensive campaign to recruit younger and less affluent people to their performances, without realizing that the findings simply reflected the fact that audience members who purchase more expensive tickets are generally older and more affluent than those in the less expensive seats, who were unrepresented among the returned questionnaires (Baumol and Bowen, 1966). Because the response was biased, and because the investigator failed to take this into account, the audience survey could mislead its sponsors.

While this hypothetical case is extreme (though perhaps not so unusual as one might hope), it indicates the problems that can result from poor research techniques. Failure to pretest questionnaires may result in answers that are useless or misleading. Failure to use multivariate statistical techniques may lead readers to infer that one factor is responsible for a second when, in fact, they are both caused by a third. Failure to sample properly may result in generalizations about an entire visitor population on the basis of responses from an unrepresentative group. Thus, the internal and external quality scales are important elements for measuring valid research.

We discovered that the internal and external quality scales were strongly associated: studies high on one scale are likely to be high on the other. The interscale correlations are .566 for the investigator questionnaire items and .733 for the report assessment data. Accordingly, the internal and external validity dimensions for each data source were combined into a general quality measure.[3] Similarly, using this single quality measure, we found that ratings from the investigator questionnaire items and the report assessment data are also highly correlated (.579). Thus, these too were combined to form a single overall quality scale that serves as our technical quality measure.[4]

The variation in research quality measured by this scale can be illustrated by comparing studies that fall high and low on the index. An example of a high quality study is a social profile survey of the visitors to a major metropolitan art museum: this study is a full standard deviation higher in technical quality than the average audience survey. In the study a questionnaire was distributed to randomly chosen visitors during four time periods selected to represent the seasons of the year. Those distributing the forms were trained and closely supervised. Nearly 5,000 visitors were approached, more than 95 percent provided usable responses, and both population variability and the width of preferred confidence intervals were considered in selecting this large a sample. The analysis was facilitated by a computer. Although neither scaling nor multivariate techniques were employed, the results were weighted to adjust for the sample frame and tests of significance and confidence intervals were established. The study report included a discussion of the research design (though previous audience research was ignored), valid linkages were drawn between the data and conclusions, and there was a discussion of the policy implications accompanied by concrete recommendations. The report lacked a synopsis of its basic findings as well as a statement of the study's limitations.

For purposes of comparison, we have selected a low quality study of the audience for a single performance of a nonprofit theatre: its quality is a full standard deviation below that of the typical audience study. The survey form was not pretested and those who administered the survey were not carefully supervised, but a probability sampling procedure was employed. The sample size, however, was not based on considerations of statistical inference, a response rate of approximately 50 percent was obtained, and no effort was made to adjust for possible response bias or for the sample design itself. The analysis was undertaken without the aid of a computer, simple bivariate statistics were the most complex data analyses performed, and the report presented little more than the distributions of respondents among the various response categories. The research design, policy issues, policy implications, and study limitations were nowhere discussed.

FACTORS PREDICTING RESEARCH QUALITY

The quality of a research study is, we think, a function of the resources that an investigator can mobilize. Such resources include the investigator's personal capacities and background and a variety of external factors, such as his or her colleagues, audiences, career incentives, time, and financial support. For instance, if the intended audience for a report is not well-equipped to judge its methodological rigor, the investigator is less constrained to maintain orthodox methodological standards. Similarly, a shortage of funds can force the investigator, whatever his or her personal standards, to employ less acceptable but more economical techniques.

In our hypothesis, then, predicting the quality of a study is partly a matter of identifying the investigator's research capacities and the necessary environmental support. To this end, we analyzed the investigator's experience and background, the organizational setting of the study and the financial resources available.

The personal capacity of the investigator to conduct high quality research depends on his or her level of training and research experience. It is true that in an analysis of 236 major federal evaluation studies initiated in 1970, Bernstein and Freeman found that the researcher's level of formal training had little bearing on study quality (1975: 115). Yet the absence of an effect of formal training may not be universal. It will be examined here through the variable investigator degree, the highest formal degree obtained by the study director.[5] Investigator experience, our measure of relevant research experience, will be assessed by the sum of the number of surveys the investigator had conducted prior to the audience study in question.[6]

Financial resources that affect the quality of a research product include the size, quality, and organization of the research staff, library and computer facilities, and disposable funds for the purchase of ancillary research materials. A convenient, albeit approximate, aggregate measure of project financial resources is the total study budget. Although Bernstein and Freeman found no significant impact of budget on quality for their evaluation studies, they excluded studies with total expenditures under $10,000. Most of the eighty-six arts audience studies considered here were conducted with more modest resources. Only ten of the directors report costs of $10,000 or more ($150,000 was the most expensive), and the median cost was a mere $471.

Three sets of institutional factors that may affect research quality can be distinguished. The first is the profession of the investigator, since different professions hold varying definitions of acceptable research procedure. Bernstein and Freeman found that variations in professional norms between social science disciplines did have consequences for research quality (1975: 118). Even sharper differences may be expected between investigators affiliated with the social sciences and those identified with the marketing or arts management professions.

A second potentially significant institutional factor is the nature of the organization in which the investigator works. The scientific method is perhaps best established in academic institutions, less so in nonacademic research organizations, and least so in arts organizations. Studies of research in other fields have yielded conflicting conclusions about the relative quality of academic and nonacademic research. In an analysis of 140 studies of technological innovations in local services, Yin et al. (1976) found no relationship between the kind of organization conducting the study and the quality of the research. Yin and Yates' assessment of case studies of urban decentralization and participation (1975), however, indicated that higher quality studies were conducted in academic institutions. Bernstein and Freeman (1975) report a similar finding.

The third institutional factor is the relationship of the organization conducting the study to the institution that is the subject of the inquiry. An in-house researcher may have a stake in producing results acceptable to his or her organization, whereas an autonomous outside researcher may find it easier to maintain an independent, objective stance. On the other hand, in-house investigators may be more sensitive to the research setting and, as a result, may develop more appropriate research designs. The counterbalancing of these two factors could explain the apparent inconsistency of previous research on this issue. Yin et al. (1976) found that outside researchers did higher quality studies than insiders. Yin and Yates, however, found no relationship between these factors, and Bernstein and Freeman found that in-house investigators did somewhat better than their unaffiliated counterparts.

We analyzed the institutional setting of art audience studies in terms of the following variables. Investigator's profession: thirty-one of the study directors were primarily arts managers; fifteen were in marketing; fifteen were identified with a social science discipline; and the remaining twenty-five were associated with a variety of other research-related fields. Organization type in which the study director worked: twenty-seven were arts institutions; twenty-three were independent research firms (nonprofit and profit); and nineteen were academic institutions. Organization experience: the number of surveys of any kind that the organization had sponsored before the study in question.[7] Finally, organization affiliation of the study director: thirty-seven of the eighty-six studies were conducted by internal researchers; forty-nine were not.

THE CORRELATES OF QUALITY

What is the actual relationship between the technical quality of the audience studies and the various study characteristics expected to affect study quality? In answering this, our first step was to examine the empirical relationship of technical quality with each study characteristic. Next, since these study characteristics are themselves empirically interrelated, it was important both to isolate the unique impact of each characteristic controlling for the influence of the others, and to obtain an estimate of their joint, overall impact on quality.

We calculated the average quality of the studies within each category of the predictor variables. Then we subtracted the average quality for all categories combined (15.40, with a standard deviation of 8.45).[8] Table 8 shows the resulting deviations from the overall mean.

First, it is evident that the investigator's prior survey research experience has virtually no bearing on the quality of his or her study. The average quality of the studies conducted by highly experienced investigators (more than nine previous studies) and by those without prior survey research experience is less than one point above average, while investigators with moderate experience (one to nine studies) performed slightly below average research (-1.49). An F-test for intergroup differences fails to meet even the .05 level of statistical significance.[9]

The second index of investigator background--the investigator's highest degree-does predict study quality. Researchers who hold Ph.D.'s and comparable credentials conduct studies which are, on the average, 4 to nearly 7 points above average. Those with only B.A.'s or M.A.'s typically produce research that is 4 to 5 points below average. (The F-test is significant at the .001 level.)

Study budget is also strongly correlated with quality. Audience research conducted with less than $350 is more than 5 points below standard, while research performed with budgets of more than $1,650 is 6 points above the mean (F-test significant at .001).

The factors related to the institutional setting predict variations in the quality measure as well. Indeed, in this sample the best predictor of all the variables is investigator profession: studies conducted by social scientists score nearly a full standard deviation above average (7.01), while research carried out by arts management personnel is three-quarters of a standard deviation (6.40) below average. The nature of the organization also makes a difference, but an organization's prior experience with survey research does not. Investigators affiliated with academic institutions and private research firms generate studies 2 and 4 points above average, respectively, while those in arts organizations produce research 5 points below average. The quality of inquiries conducted by organizations with extensive experience, however, is a statistically insignificant 3 points above the quality of research by moderately experienced organizations and only a single point above the studies of organizations with no prior experience. Finally, outside research is clearly of higher quality than in-house studies. The mean quality of the former is more than 5 points greater than of the latter.[10]

In summary, then, by technical standards the best research in this sample is produced by individuals with Ph.D.'s or comparable degrees who are social scientists affiliated with private research firms or academic institutions.

Since the predictor factors are highly correlated among themselves, it is necessary to examine their simultaneous impact on quality if we are to isolate the importance of each. For instance, both budget and type of organization strongly predict research quality but these variables are also highly related to one another. The median budget of studies conducted in private firms,

Table 8

Deviation from Average Study Quality by Investigator Background, Resources, and Institutional Setting

Study Characteristic	Deviation[1]	(N)	Study Characteristic	Deviation	(N)
Investigator Research Background					
Investigator experience			Investigator degree[2]		
More than 9 studies	0.64	(23)	Other advanced	6.85	(9)
1-9 studies	-1.49	(23)	Ph.D.	4.11	(27)
0 studies	0.75	(36)	MBA	0.74	(7)
			MA	-5.00	(19)
			BA	-3.76	(22)
Resources					
Budget[2]					
More than $1649	6.29	(23)			
$350-1649	-0.02	(21)			
Less than $350	-5.58	(26)			
Institutional Setting					
Investigator profession[2]			Organization experience		
Social science	7.01	(15)	More than 12 studies	1.22	(15)
Other research related	4.13	(25)	1-12 studies	-1.72	(15)
Marketing	-0.66	(15)	0 studies	0.25	(30)
Arts	-6.40	(31)			
Organization type[2]			Organization affiliation[2]		
Private firm	4.13	(25)	External research	2.76	(37)
Academic	1.99	(26)	Internal research	-2.76	(37)
Arts	-5.02	(32)			

[1] Deviation from the overall mean

[2] F-test for intergroup differences is significant at the .001 level.

academic institutions, and arts organizations are $6,260, $750, and $253, respectively. We cannot tell from the figures reported in Table 8 whether budget, type of conducting organization, or some combination of both accounts for the variation in quality.

To answer this question, we apply the statistical technique of multiple regression analysis, which enables us to inspect the relationship between research quality and any single predictor variable, while holding all other predictor variables constant.

The predictor variables are entered into a regression equation with quality as the dependent variable. Investigator degree is entered in a dichotomized form, with those holding a Ph.D. or related degree joined in one category, and those without such degrees grouped in the other. The logarithmic transformation of the budget is used,[11] and investigator profession and organization experience are entered as sets of dummy (dichotomous) variables. Since investigator and organization experience exhibited insignificant, zero-order associations with quality, they are excluded from the analysis. Because of the high correlation between two other variables--organizational affiliation and type of organization--the less powerful predictor of the two, organizational affiliation, is also deleted.

The correlations and the regression coefficients of predictor variables with study quality are displayed in Table 9. The correlations are consistent with the patterns seen in Table 8, but the standardized regression (beta) coefficients reveal that several of the predictor variables have little impact on quality once other variables are controlled. For example, the substantial simple correlation of .48 for investigator degree is reduced to a beta value of -.02 once the confounding effects of other variables are removed. This means that whether an investigator holds a Ph.D. or comparable degree has no direct independent impact on study quality. Rather, the high correlation resulted from the fact that study directors with Ph.D.'s frequently were in the social sciences or other research-related professions and had high budgets with which to work.

The association between budget and quality remains very high even after controlling for the other bariables. The beta value of .63 exceeds that for any other variable and indicates that one can best predict the quality of an arts audience study if one knows what funds were available to its director.

The beta coefficients for the three dummy variables of investigator profession are all statistically significant and range from .19 for those in marketing to .28 for social scientists and .39 for those in other research-related disciplines. These beta coefficients signify that, other factors held constant, investigators who were not arts professionals generated technically better research. Finally, although the simple correlations of organization types are substantial, the more important beta coefficients are not. The beta value is -.08 for private firms and .14 for academic institutions, neither of which approaches statistical significance.

Thus, although a number of factors are empirically associated with higher quality studies, it is evident that only two were found to have a substantial direct independent effect: budget and the profession of the study director. Moreover, with only a little assistance from the other variables these two explain 63 percent of the variance in study quality. (Variance explained is derived by squaring the multiple correlation coefficient.) This means that we were able to predict audience study quality in this sample with considerable precision.

With certain caveats we will note in a moment, the unstandardized regression coefficients can be used to predict the likely quality of a proposed audience study. If the study were allocated virtually no budget and placed in the hands of an investigator primarily identified with the arts, a quality index of approximately 6.2 could be expected; this is more than a full standard deviation (8.3 points) below the average quality level for all the studies. An investigator with a Ph.D. or related degree would not improve quality, but increasing the budget would have a dramatic impact. By this model, expansion of the budget from $0 to $1,000 would add 5.8 points to the score. (It would require an additional $10,000 to bolster the score another 5.8 points.) Employing a marketing analyst as primary investigator means an additional 4.0 points; a social scientist adds 5.8 points; and a member of a research-related profession (these were urban planning, architecture, engineering and applied mathematics, and public opinion polling) increases the score 7.1 points. Whether the study is assigned to an investigator located in an arts organization, private firm, or academic institution makes very little difference, though 2.4 points might be added if the academic setting is selected.

Table 9

Simple Correlations and Regression Coefficients of Audience Study Quality with Investigator Background, Resources, and Institutional Setting

Study Characteristic	r^1	beta	B	F^1_{63}	p
Investigator Background					
Investigator degree: Ph.D. or related	.497	-.016	-0.26	0.02	n.s.
Resources					
Log of budget	.699	.627	5.83	41.92	◄.001
Institutional Setting					
Investigator profession					
social science	.284	.267	5.81	6.12	◄.05
other related	.399	.390	7.08	12.50	◄.001
marketing	-.061	.191	4.01	4.60	◄.05
Organization type					
private firm	.315	-.082	-1.61	0.61	n.s.
academic institution	.230	.138	2.38	1.82	n.s.
Constant			6.21		
Multiple Correlation Coefficient (R)			0.794	17.91^2	◄.001
R-Squared			0.631		
(N)			(70)		

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[1] Key: r=simple correlation; beta= standardized regression coefficent; F=F-test value (1 and 63 degrees of freedom); p=statistical probability level.

[2] F-value with 6 and 63 degrees of freedom.

Thus, if the studies reviewed here are typical, expanding the budget from $0 to $1,000, selecting a marketing analyst rather than an arts professional, and quartering the study in an academic institution rather than an arts organization would increase expected quality by over 12 points to a total of 18.4. On the basis of these studies, one would predict that if a social scientist were chosen in place of the marketing analyst, the score would rise to 20.2 and if a member of a related research profession chosen instead, the increment would be still more, over 15 points for a total of 21.5.

Of course these figures, a result of manipulating the data of the eighty-six audience studies, represent tendencies, not hard and fast laws. For example, some arts organizations have produced technically better studies than some academically based researchers. Also, these figures rest on the assumptions that the eighty-six studies are representative of arts audience studies in general and that the associations found are genuine and do not reflect some other set of underlying factors that influence both the predictor variables and research quality. We believe both of these assumptions are reasonable, but we are unable to prove either with our data. Finally, even if the relationships found have existed in the past, they will not automatically continue to exist in the future. For example, if research users were to become much more sophisticated and demanding about research methodology, the technical quality of studies might become less dependent upon the profession of the study director or the nature of the conducting organization. We do not suggest that our findings be applied systematically to every research-planning decision. rather they are a description of the factors affecting the quality of research that has been done in the past six years. They should be seen as suggestive guidelines only.

Clearly, however, arts audience research varies enormously in its technical quality, and the evidence presented here suggests that much of this variation is a direct consequence of two elements of the research process--the resources available for the study's execution and the professional identity of the principal investigator. The other elements in our hypothesis seem to have little immediate impact on the quality of the final research product.

PREDICTING THE UTILITY OF ARTS AUDIENCE STUDIES

Through an assessment of the available literature and through informal discussions with thirty individuals involved in audience research and arts management, we identified ten areas in which the results of audience research are often applied. These ten areas were aggregated into two subgroups, the internal operations of arts organizations and their external relationships. Internal policy questions included such matters as the evaluation of selection of exhibits or works to be performed, the development of educational programs, and the establishment of ticket prices and of hours or performance times. External policy issues had to do with planning public relations campaigns, designing strategies for approaching funding sources, and developing or evaluating audience expansion programs. The respondent was asked to rate the actual usefulness of his or her study in each of the ten policy areas. An internal utility scale was created by summing the ratings of seven internal items, and an external utility scale was created from the sum of the ratings for three external items.[12]

A high or low rating on these scales can be illustrated by referring to the two studies used earlier to exhibit the meaning of the quality index. The survey of visitors to an art museum rated nearly one standard deviation above average in overall utility (assessed by combining the two utility measures). This survey proved of high value to the museum for its public relations efforts, development of strategies for recruiting new visitors, the assessment of an arts development plan, the evaluation of the drawing power of a particular exhibit, and the development of educational materials related to the museum. In contrast, the survey of a nonprofit theatre audience rated one-half standard deviation below average in utility. The only area of high application was in the theatre's audience development plans.

We considered the possibility that ratings would be biased by the respondent's relationship to the research and to its application. In half the cases (54 percent) the respondent reported that he or she was the person "primarily concerned with managerial or policy applications of the study's findings," and half (55 percent) reported that they were "principally involved in making the decision to finance or fund the audience study." A comparison of the average internal and external utility ratings of these groups indicates that their assessments do not substantially differ. Directors involved in applying results are slightly more likely to note utility than are other investigators (1.30 and 0.29 point differences for internal and external dimensions, respectively), but, contrary to expectations, funders are slightly less likely to provide a high rating than nonfunders (-0.66 and -0.69 point differences). Since none of the observed discrepancies approaches statistical significance, we assume that these factors do not substantially bias the utility ratings.

Students of social research have identified a number of factors that affect whether study results are applied, although few of their hypotheses have been subjected to empirical test. In general, these factors have to do with such general concerns as: the characteristics of the study and investigator, such as study quality and substantive conclusions, investigator reputation, and project resources; the characteristics associated with the potential user, such as the user's attitude toward and experience with social research and the political environment into which the research is received; and the features of the investigator-user interaction, including the study's timeliness, the degree of cooperation in the design and execution of the study, and the means by which study results are communicated (Caro, 1971; Rossi and Williams, 1972; Weiss, 1972, 1977; Caplan et al., 1975; Cohen and Garet, 1975; van de Vall et al., 1976; Rein and White, 1977).

We are primarily concerned in this chapter with only one of these factors--technical quality of the research--and we expected that high quality research should be more useful than research of lesser merit. The quality of evaluation research, for instance, has been shown to influence whether the program under evaluation is concluded to be a success or failure. Reliance on faulty studies may lead to fundamentally misdirected policy decisions (Mann, 1972; Yin and Yates, 1975; Gordon and Morse, 1975; Yin et al., 1976).

Relatively little research, however, has tested the assumption that high quality research is applied more widely than poor research. Evidence that skepticism is widespread among top federal policy makers over the reliability of applied social research (Caplan, 1976) suggests that these users, at least, are highly sensitive to the issue of research quality. A study by Weiss and Bacuvalas (1977), in which 155 federal, state, and local mental health officials were asked to rate brief descriptions of actual research studies, found that of five study characteristics evaluated research quality was the best predictor of willingness to consider the findings in making relevant decisions. On the other hand, Patton et al. (1977), in intensive case studies of twenty evaluations of health programs, concluded that methodological rigor played a very minor role in determining the extent to which evaluation results were utilized.

In isolating the impact of quality, however, it is important to separate the direct impact of quality itself from the joint effect of some underlying factor on both quality and utility. One correlate of quality that may also affect utility is the nature of the organization conducting a study. Although outside investigators may produce research that is higher quality than that conducted by their in-house counterparts, van de Vall and his colleagues have argued that research done by insiders is more likely to be used (van de Vall, 1975; van de Vall et al., 1976). Consistent with this thesis is Caplan's (1976) finding that top federal officials make extremely disproportionate use of research conducted within their own agencies. While arts audience studies differ from the kind of applied social research that has been the subject of these previous studies, we felt it was important to look at the relationship between utility and quality and, also, between utility and the correlates of quality.

The average ratings for usefulness of audience studies are displayed in Table 10. The most notable finding is that nothing we have measured, neither quality nor its correlates--investigator background, resources, and institutional setting--has any substantial impact on research utility, at least as perceived by study directors. Although some differences are apparent for organization experience, organization type, and research quality, none of these approaches even a minimum level of statistical significance. Contrary to expectations, the relationship between utility and quality is small and inconsistent. High quality research has an internal utility rating 0.13 below average, medium-quality research 0.66 above average, and

Table 10

Deviation from Average Audience Study Internal and External Utility by Investigator Background, Resources, Institutional Setting and Quality

Study Characteristic	Deviation[1]				Study Characteristic	Deviation[1]			
	Internal	(N)[2]	External	(N)		Internal	(N)	External	(N)
Investigator Research Background									
Investigator experience					Investigator degree				
More than 9 studies	-0.31	(21)	-0.49	(21)	Other advanced	0.46	(8)	0.99	(8)
1-9 studies	0.24	(19)	0.77	(19)	Ph.D.	0.99	(20)	-0.19	(21)
0 studies	0.10	(20)	-0.03	(20)	MBA	0.17	(6)	0.41	(6)
					MA	-0.66	(16)	0.11	(17)
					BA	-0.66	(20)	-0.41	(20)
Resources									
Budget									
More than $1649	-0.42	(20)	-0.00	(20)					
$350-1649	-0.44	(16)	-0.13	(17)					
Less than $350	0.72	(20)	0.09	(20)					
Institutional Setting									
Investigator profession					Previous organization experience				
Social science	0.75	(8)	0.50	(9)	More than 12 studies	-1.99	(13)	-0.91	(13)
Other related	-0.25	(24)	-0.39	(24)	1-12 studies	-0.03	(12)	0.72	(12)
Marketing	-0.44	(11)	0.04	(11)	No previous studies	1.01	(26)	0.13	(26)
Arts	0.17	(28)	0.17	(29)					
Organization type					Organization affiliation				
Private firm	1.16	(19)	0.44	(19)	Internal research	0.27	(31)	0.08	(31)
Academic	-1.45	(23)	-0.55	(23)	External research	-0.26	(32)	-0.08	(32)
Arts	0.55	(27)	0.20	(27)					
Quality									
Quality index (points)									
High (20-37)	-0.13	(21)	0.14	(21)					
Medium (11-19)	0.66	(25)	0.04	(25)					
Low (0-10)	-0.51	(26)	-0.15	(27)					

[1] Deviation from the overall mean; internal and external utility.

[2] (N) = Number of studies.

low-quality work 0.51 below average. Our data indicate that there is extensive use of audience research in decision making, that it varies from study to study but that none of the factors considered here influences the extent to which research is applied.

Although the bivariate relationships between the utility measures and predictor variables are largely insubstantial, it is possible that three-variable or higher order interaction effects may be present. Among the most likely candidates is an interaction between investigator experience and organizational affiliation. It can be argued that the effect of investigator experience on utility will be more pronounced if the research is internally based than if it is conducted outside the arts organization. When the research is internally based, an investigator with prior survey experience is likely to design a study that is more responsive to the specific policy conditions and problems of the arts organization. When the research is externally based, however, the prior experience of an investigator is less likely to result in such special sensitivity.

Though the relatively small number of cases on which the statistics are based renders any conclusions highly tentative, the patterns are consistent with expectations. Among studies housed within arts organizations, investigators with at least some prior survey experience produce studies which are on average 1.87 points higher in internal utility and 1.32 points higher in external utility than those studies carried out by inexperienced analysts; the corresponding correlations are .320 and .329 (F-test significant at the .05 level in both cases). By contrast, investigator experience actually has a modest negative effect on utility when the research is housed outside the arts organization. The difference between the research of experienced and inexperienced investigators is -1.48 points for internal utility and -1.05 points for external utility; the correlations are, respectively, -.169 and -.248 (F-test not significant). The differences are not large, but they do suggest that prior research experience only makes for better use of the results when the researcher is on the staff of the arts organization.

But we are still left with a puzzle. Our independent variables enable us to predict the technical quality of arts audience research with an unusually high degree of accuracy. But neither research quality, the common-sense explanation, nor any of the underlying variables that predicted technical quality so well, seem to have a major effect on whether research findings are applied. In contrast to explaining 63 percent of variance in quality, we can predict only 9 percent of the variance in internal utility and 6 percent in external utility.

To some extent, the absence of an association between quality and utility may be a product of the nature of arts audience research and arts policy. Research-based policy in such areas as education and health has a long tradition and is often carried out at the federal level. Policy makers are in a position to draw on the best and to disregard the worst. By contrast, arts policy is young and largely decentralized. Most of research that we studied was performed by local institutions, with few resources and little cumulative experience.[13] It may be that many of those who would use audience studies are not sufficiently aware of research standards to use them critically and selectively.

Even so, this explanation is not in itself satisfactory. The extent to which studies are applied varies sharply from case to case and something must be causing this variation. In the absence of clear answers related to quality or its correlates, we conducted open-ended interviews with individuals who had either directed arts audience studies or been responsible for applying their results. The next chapter reports our findings.

NOTES

1. Quality measures based on the investigator questionnaire information could be somewhat inflated, since there may be a tendency for investigators to report greater conformity to the canons of scientific inquiry than occurred in practice. By contrast, quality measures based on our own report assessment may somewhat underestimate quality, since the failure of the report to mention a preferable methodological feature is coded as if absent from the study.

2. The internal and external validity items were the following (a study was scored as high quality on an item if it included the procedure described):

Investigator's questionnaire internal validity: survey pretested; trained field staff; survey administration directly supervised; survey measures based on measures used in previous studies; bivariate statistics used; tables with more than two variables used; multiple regression and related techniques employed; other multivariate techniques utilized; computer-based analysis.

Report assessment internal validity: procedures or instrument pretested; trained research staff; conventional measurement techniques employed; previous research discussed or used; scaling techniques employed; visitors distinguished from visits; bivariate analysis; table analysis; multivariate analysis; valid linkage between data and conclusions.

Investigator's questionnaire external validity: some sampling procedure used; sample size of at least 500; response rate of at least 60 percent; width of confidence intervals a consideration in establishing sample size; population heterogeneity a consideration in establishing sample size; response bias assessed; weighting used for response bias, sample frame, or both; tests of statistical inference used; confidence intervals established; analysis of variance employed.

Report assessment external validity: sample and/or population clearly defined; sample definition appropriate; random sample principles employed; sample bias checked; respondent representativeness checked; tests of statistical inference used; weighting used as a result of sample design; generalizability of findings described.

3. Six additional items were added to the ten internal and eight external validity items in forming the quality scale based on the report assessment data. These items were: research and policy issues conceptualized; research design described; implications of study results discussed; specific policy recommendations offered; nontechnical summary of results included; results compared with those of other surveys.

4. The score of the audience studies on the overall quality scale ranges from 0 to 37, with a median between 15 and 16. The mean is 15.40 and the standard deviation is 8.45.

5. The highest earned degree is coded as follows: (1) high school diploma; (2) college B.A. or B.S.; (3) M.A., Ed.M.; (4) M.B.A., D.B.A. (professional business degrees); (5) Ph.D, Ed.D.

6. The investigators were asked in the survey: "At the time of the study, how many previous audience studies or other surveys had the director participated in or directed?"

7. The investigators were asked: "At the time of the study . . . how much prior experience had the conducting organization had with (previous audience studies or other surveys)?"

8. For example, if studies conducted by people with brown eyes had an average quality of 20.00 and those conducted by people with blue eyes had an average quality of 10.00, the value of brown eyes would be 20.00-15.40 or +4.60, and the value of blue eyes would be 10.00-15.40, or -5.40.

9. An F-test indicates how likely it is that an observed intergroup difference could occur by chance alone rather than as a result of a social process. If an F-test is significant at the .10 level, for instance, there is a 10 percent likelihood that the differences observed in the quality of two groups of studies reflects a chance occurrence and it does not indicate that the two groups actually differ in their quality. A researcher, then, would generally argue that the observed difference was not substantial enough to signify a true difference. On

the other hand, if the F-test is significant at the .01 level, there is only a one percent chance that the difference between the groups is the product of a chance outcome, and the researcher is more confident that the difference reflects a real social process.

10. The importance of the internal-external distinction in research location is further corroborated by a separate analysis of the externally conducted research alone. Studies vary in the degree of cooperation between the investigator and the arts institution whose audience was the subject of the study. If external housing of research is important for producing high quality, it can be reasoned that the highest quality external studies should be those conducted by investigators with greatest independence from the subject institution. This possibility can be examined by dividing the externally conducted studies into three categories: (1) no cooperation (respondents characterized their study as one with "no consultation in the design and analysis of the study, all decisions made by conducting organization"); (2) moderate cooperation ("subject institution formally reviewed study design and analysis, but most study decisions made by conducting organization"); (3) strong cooperation ("subject institution had approximately equal voice in study design and analysis" or "determined most of the study design and analysis"). As anticipated, the mean quality of the no cooperation studies (n=14) is 1.88 points above the average external study quality (which itself is 2.76 points above the overall average); the moderate cooperation studies (n=17) have an average quality identical to that of all external studies; and the strong cooperation (n=6) studies are 4.39 points below the external average. Thus, the critical advantage of external research housing for quality appears to be that the investigator is freed of nonscientific constraints from the institution that is the subject of the study.

11. The logarithm of the project budget is used on the assumption that the marginal utility of each additional dollar declines as the total budget rises.

12. Each item was rated on three-point scale (1=not useful, 2=somewhat useful, 3=highly useful). The question was as follows (the mean and standard deviation for the rating of each item appears in parentheses): "To what extent were the (audience) study's findings actually utilized? Please rate the . . . utility of the study for each of the following areas:

Internal Utility

(1) select exhibits or works to be performed (1.62; 0.90)
(2) evaluate exhibits, performances, programs (1.77; 0.94)
(3) develop educational or informative materials (1.63; 0.83)
(4) decide on hours and/or performance times (1.48; 0.83)
(5) decide on admission or ticket prices (1.52; 0.91)
(6) decide on organization management or personnel (1.28; 0.74)
(7) initiate or evaluate arts development plan (1.76; 0.92)

External Utility

(1) promote public relations (1.96; 0.84)
(2) gain or maintain support from funding sources (1.59; 0.77)
(3) develop or evaluate audience expansion strategies (2.20; 0.89)

The mean and standard deviation of the internal utility scale are 13.63 and 3.81; for the external utility scale these values are 5.72 and 1.96. The two scales exhibit relatively high internal consistency in that there is a marked tendency for a high rating on one of the scale items to be associated with a high rating on the other scale items. The 21 item-to-item correlations among the internal utility scale items range from .22 to .77 and they average .44; the range for the 3 external utility item-to-item correlations is .35 to .51, with an average of .43.

13. In fact, research on museum visitors, which is part of a tradition dating back to the work of Robinson in the 1920s, was found to be significantly more highly utilized than were studies of performing arts audiences.

CHAPTER 3

ORGANIZATIONAL FACTORS AFFECTING RESEARCH UTILITY

To better understand the subtle institutional processes by which audience research is put to use, we have intensively examined twenty-five audience studies. These studies included all of those in our possession that had been conducted between 1974 and 1977 in the New England and Middle Atlantic regions. Among the studies were surveys concerned with economic impact, general planning, specific planning, exhibit effectiveness, and members or subscribers. Eleven museum studies were included (six art museums, two history museums, one science museum, and two other museums), as were ten performing arts organization studies (five theatres, two classical music organizations, one opera, one ballet, and one other). There were also two cross-sectional studies and two surveys of those attending a number of different arts events. In each instance we attempted to interview both the study director and the person most likely to have been in a position to use the research results. However, in eight instances either the study director was the key user or interviews with only one of the two individuals could be obtained. Forty-two semi-structured interviews were completed; they averaged forty minutes in length and ranged from twenty to ninety minutes.[1] As additional background material, unstructured interviews were conducted with twenty-five other individuals who had commissioned, directed, or attempted to use the results of audience research.

Our interviews with the directors and users of a wide range of studies revealed that the conventional view of the decision-making process provides a poor guide as to what really happens when arts organizations sponsor audience studies. One might expect that research is undertaken to help solve a specific problem. However, the researchers and arts managers who shared their experiences with us portrayed a different process. Their accounts explained the perplexing lack of connection between research technical quality and utility. They also suggest lessons for those who would undertake audience research themselves. In this chapter, we describe the purposes for which the research was initiated. Then, we illustrate the varied ways in which audience research was applied. Third, we explain the ways in which research enters the decision-making process. And, finally, we discuss the factors that are critical in the use of audience-study results.

THE PURPOSES OF AUDIENCE RESEARCH

Not one of the twenty-five studies for which directors and/or users were interviewed was undertaken primarily to gather information necessary for a specific managerial decision. Instead, they were begun because of factors such as the need for political leverage, the appearance of an unexpected opportunity to have a free study conducted, and a variety of other concerns only indirectly related to specific organization decisions. While most managers exhibited a lively curiosity that influenced the content of the survey questions, the need for data for specific decisions was never a study's raison d'etre.

Political factors

The most frequently cited reason for undertaking an audience study was politics, prominently mentioned for ten of the twenty-five studies. Political purposes included acquiring evidence useful in seeking funding, gaining leverage in internal policy debates, and appeasing members of the organization's board of directors or other influentials.

The initiation of research for the sake of seeking outside financing is illustrated in the case of one study undertaken to document public support for a new performing arts facility. Said the study director: "A committee (of bankers and businessmen) set about to raise money to get (the local government) to take over the theatre for the county once it was renovated. The study was a spin-off of that effort .... It was done to prove that there was a market and to gain additional support to get the county to approve and accept a building." In another instance, an economic impact study was done to illustrate the importance of a beleaguered theatre district to an urban economy. The city was ready to act and "the research had clout because it documented the obvious." In yet another case, a cross-sectional survey was commissioned by a municipal government to document an existing arts council's failure to meet local art needs. The survey results contributed to the resignation of the old council and the creation of a new one. Finally, one arts council conducted a study essentially for the purpose of announcing its presence and increasing its scope of operations.

Other research was commissioned for use in internal debate. Individuals needed additional ammunition for their positions and were confident that a research study would support their cause. Though the study instigator may have been open to persuasion, the primary motive was to compile data for a position rather than to resolve an issue. One theatre manager, for instance, in explaining his reasons for surveying the audience of a summer drama festival immediately after becoming manager, stated: "In the summer, (the theatre) did seven shows in rolling rep, which I think is insane itself, and (the theatre was) doing about 50 percent business.... I had the feeling that (the theatre) should be delivering a more popular product, and the survey helped document this. The next year we provided more popular plays and got 90 percent business." Being new to the particular job, this experienced arts manager needed to suggest the value of an alternative policy before instituting a controversial change, and he (correctly) anticipated that a survey would support his own preference for more popular fare. Similarly, a new director for a rather traditional museum saw in a wide-ranging membership study a fulcrum for change: "I had been at the (museum) a little over a year as director and felt it was important to see how we appeared to our major constituency, the membership. We had been in business for a long while and certain things continued to be done because they had always been done that way, without our knowing what our members wanted." Still another museum visitor survey was initiated for evidence to combat pressure for an admission fee. The converse purpose motivated one study of another arts facility: a survey was undertaken to justify the institution of an admission fee to a skeptical state funding agency.

Finally, audience studies are occasionally done in response to pressure from influential membership committees or members of boards of directors. One inquiry was undertaken of a performing arts institution because of a membership committee's concern with what it thought was an overly "elite" audience. The study's findings, however, were largely ignored by management. This was also the outcome of study initiated at the behest of a chairperson of a museum's membership committee. The administration of the museum regarded the survey questionnaire as "silly" and the disappointed study director concluded that her study "was just an exercise." She observed: "I got a lot of experience and a lot of frustration. I didn't know who to tell the results to or who would listen to me."

Opportunity

The second most common general motivation for undertaking audience research was the appearance of an unexpected and relatively free opportunity to undertake a study. This was a principal consideration in eight of the twenty-five cases we examined. Arts managers took advantage of occasions for inexpensive research to satisfy a kind of free-floating curiosity. Volunteer labor, the availability of outside funding, or both were usually the catalyst. In one instance, museum administrators were in the process of preparing a grant application for federal funds. It was a near certainty that the museum would receive the grant, and at the last minute an affiliated researcher revised the proposal to include a visitor survey. At another museum, when questioned about the timing of a visitor study, the director said: "Simple, funds became available.... (A federal agency) made funding available for the purpose so (the museum) used the occasion to do a study." Volunteer outside labor was the motivating factor in other instances. In one case, a county-wide attenders/nonattenders study was included in a larger audience development program only after a university professor stepped forward, suggested the study, and promised to design the questionnaire and provide student labor. A theatre study was undertaken when a business school student with an outside grant took it on as a summer job. The initiative for such studies often rested with a single individual prepared to take advantage of an opportune situation. One researcher, hired as a consultant for overall planning, defined his role to include carrying out a visitor study.

The museum "didn't so much want the study done as they, kicking and screaming, grudgingly allowed me to do it."

General concerns

The third major reason for undertaking audience research, cited as most important in six of the twenty-five studies, was a vague sense of concern, a feeling on the part of managers that they are working in a vacuum and that certain kinds of background information, usually not clearly specified, would be good to have. In several cases, for instance, museums were about to undertake long-range physical planning and felt that they needed "some input" from visitors or wanted "to get some idea about the audience." One outside researcher complained that a museum representative approached him with "vague, vacuous questions." Another said of his clients on an arts council, "they vaguely suggested doing a survey of general goals." A museum gallery director spoke of the difficulty he had in fixing goals for a study of his visitors, and an in-house research director for a performing arts institution described his study as a "first feeble attempt at research.... Some of it was stabbing in the dark." The studies were inspired by a genuine desire to learn more and a sense that so little was known that any increment in knowledge would be worthwhile.

THE IMPACT OF AUDIENCE STUDIES

Despite the many reasons for which these studies were undertaken and the wide range of their quality, once they were completed, arts managers did use the results extensively. The reasons for this apparent paradox--widespread application of research undertaken for diffuse or non-instrumental reasons--will be explained in the sections that follow. Here we describe the range and extent of applications reported.

Participants in all but two of the twenty-five studies mentioned at least one example of study impact, and multiple uses were cited in many cases. Of seventy-seven uses described, fifty-one (or 66 percent) were broadly instrumental, related to such specific organizational decisions as physical planning, marketing, programming, or further research. twenty-six (34 percent) were basically political, related either to internal politics or to external lobbying and fund raising. Instrumental usage was made of twenty of the twenty-five studies, while political application was made of eighteen of the studies. Instrumental applications can be further divided into physical planning, marketing, research, and programming; political usage can be divided into internal and external politics.

Instrumental application

The most frequently mentioned use of audience research was for the instrumental area of physical planning, cited for fourteen of the studies and representing 29 percent of all applications (Table 11). In nearly half of these cases, research findings were useful for decisions about the orientation of museum visitors (e.g., signs, information desks, guide training, brochures) or about visitor conveniences (e.g., special bus services, restaurant facilities, roadway markings, cleaner washrooms). Audience research was also cited as influencing decisions about ticket and admission prices, performance times and museum hours, exhibit labeling and design, exhibit acquisitions policies, and performance sites. More generally, studies were said to have an indirect influence on architectural planning and to increase staff concern with visitor orientation.

In marketing, the second most important area of instrumental application, audience research helped with decisions to change the target of marketing efforts and to change the themes of promotional materials. More generally, studies were also given credit for stimulating institutional thinking about audience composition, marketing, and audience development.

Surprisingly, in 12 percent of the applications the directors and users reported that they used the results in connection with more research. Six studies were used to encourage research beyond the institution sponsoring the study; three studies aroused enthusiasm for further research within the same organization. Finally, study results had a direct effect on programming choices or on the thinking of administrators about programming in 6 percent of the applications.

Table 11

Frequency of Instrumental and Political Applications of Audience Research Results

Application	Number of Studies Citing Application[1]	Number of Applications	Percent of All Applications
Instrumental--total	20	51	66.2
Physical planning	14	22	28.6
Marketing	12	15	19.5
Research	8	9	11.7
Programming	5	5	6.5
Political--total	18	26	33.8
Internal politics	14	17	22.1
External politics	9	9	11.7
All applications	23	77	100.0

[1] More than one citation was found in some studies.

Political application

Internal political consequences were cited for fourteen of the twenty-five studies, representing 22 percent of all uses mentioned. Such political uses included increasing trustee interest, selling administrators on the value of marketing, aiding the reorganization of a local arts council, providing leverage with parental or affiliated organizations, sparking the withdrawal of some members to form new institutions, and making curators more secure in their positions. Of the application areas described here, internal political uses were the most often unexpected by those who had other purposes in mind at the time the study was conceived.

Use in external political areas was mentioned in nine of the studies and represented 12 percent of all instances cited. Audience research results were used to seek funding from municipal and state governments and from private individuals and concerns. No interviewees explicitly indicated the results were useful in approaching the federal government.

It is evident, then, that audience research, whatever the reason it is undertaken, has payoffs for arts organizations in a wide range of substantive areas. Even research that is poor by orthodox standards of social science inquiry played a useful role in the deliberations of art managers. The conventional view of research holds that it is most powerful when it is most sophisticated, that good research, designed to address specific problems, is used to make specific decisions about these problems. While this ideal model may characterize a few of the studies, for the most part audience research is highly variable in quality, is rarely designed with specific decisions in mind, yet is reported as being highly useful. This could reflect a lack of research and managerial sophistication among arts administrators, but we think not. Rather, just as research is not undertaken for the purposes commonly supposed, research findings do not play the role in rational decision-making that has been attributed to them. To understand how audience research becomes applied, let us look more closely at the ways in which study findings have affected arts management.

THE ROLE OF AUDIENCE RESEARCH FINDINGS IN ARTS MANAGEMENT

The most notable feature of the impact of research findings on arts management is that it is invariably a marginal one. This is true in several senses. First, arts managers usually have at least some administrative experience, are often aware of the limitations of research, and rely on their own experience and judgment to assess research conclusions. Research findings are used selectively in the context of a complex background of previously acquired knowledge and beliefs. For instance, a performing arts manager cited an audience study--the technical limitations of which he was fully aware--as influencing his decision to change promotional strategies for a series of public performances: "It helped us refocus our promotional efforts in the (outdoor drama series). I'm not totally trustful of the results, but they did show a large number of people heard about the concerts in the community newspapers, which we hadn't expected, and even if it's only half as large as the survey indicated, it is very economical advertising. We're putting more money into the neighborhood press." Studies frequently serve to reinforce preferences already held or decisions already favored. The results of one study, said a theatre manager, "followed exactly what my gut was saying. I just wanted to be sure I was right."

Conversely, when research results contradict strongly held positions or views, they are likely to be ignored despite high technical quality and clear-cut policy implications. Thus, one well-executed museum visitor study had virtually no impact even though it contained implications for museum design and visitor orientation. As one person acquainted with the study recounted: "(The museum staffers) were skeptical, first because they could not believe that (the research director) knew more about the public than they did, and second because they did not feel that knowing about the public had anything to do with how the galleries should be handled.... The major criticism of (the research director) was that he was an outsider who lacked a depth of knowledge based on years of experience. He was not criticized on any specifically methodological grounds: his critics didn't know what methodology was." In some instances, studies provided material for those on all sides of a debate. One somewhat cynical research veteran observed of another museum study: "I'm a bit jaundiced against this study, I have to say. People have pulled out of it what they wanted. They picked and chose what they needed to support their position. It's a predictable use."

A second sense in which audience studies are marginal is that decisions into which they enter usually involve competing priorities. Even when participants take the accuracy of findings for granted and agree on the implications, differences in values strongly affect their willingness to implement the findings. In one typical instance, the audience at a performance strongly preferred an earlier curtain time, but action on this finding was thwarted by the need for a tight rehearsal schedule. Similarly, many museum directors and curators balanced their findings on visitor needs against their commitment to other museum functions. One museum director put it this way: "My chief purpose is to preserve the collection; my secondary purpose is to offer programs and services which will maintain public support." Indeed, our interviewees cited many instances of administrative or curatorial resistance to research implications that were perceived as implicitly populist. Thus, research frequently confronts vested interests, making direct application problematic. As one director of a performing arts audience study put it, "In general, data step on toes."

Finally, audience research findings are marginal because they often address problems which in organizations with limited funds and staff, are given marginal attention. One performing arts manager favored a marketing strategy suggested by a study (to arrange a dinner package with a neighboring hotel), but noted that the "hand-to-mouth" existence of his organization precluded arranging for even such a minimal innovation. Similarly, several individuals in arts councils felt that other demands on their time had prevented them from fully disseminating the results of audience studies they had undertaken. And one festival director attributed an inability to use research results to the precarious economic existence of his organization: "One of the restraints on the implementation of new policy was that the festival is just so poor."

If research results play a largely marginal role in managerial policymaking, its impact is highly indirect as well. Research contributes in circuitous, often unexpected, ways to the policy process.

In many cases, the studies are used less to suggest solutions to problems than to catalyze action on a burning issue or to symbolize a point of view: "I think that the survey results basically gave us a data base to support many of the things we had an inclination about already.... But there was nothing cataclysmically different from what we had expected. It simply gave us a statistical base from which to work." In one museum where a labeling study was undertaken, the specific findings have been largely ignored, but staff people arguing for more label material often cite the study to bolster their position.

In other cases, directors or users mentioned that study findings found application but were at a loss to assess the findings' relative weight in the decision-making process, again suggesting that the effects were largely intangible. One sponsor of an internally managed public opinion poll, the results of which were used in a successful lobbying effort, said of the study, at one point: "It was definitely effective in our case and at our level of government." Several moments later, however, he thought that: "It is hard to attribute anything directly to the report. The biggest thing was impact--much of what was found was very obvious, but they never (had done) anyting about it.... They needed some kind of incentive." The effect was more catalytic than decisive. Another in-house research director noted that she used survey results mainly to legitimize decisions already reached.

In several other instances, staff members of arts organizations assumed the role of champions of a survey, using it repeatedly in arguments over issues involving the public. In these cases, data was brought to bear in the decision-making process, but its use was largely symbolic, representing more generalized commitments to such principles as service, better visitor orientation, or the value of marketing. In these cases the research was simply part of a much broader process of discourse and contention over organizational values and aims.[2]

The research process itself is at times as influential as the study findings. An audience study can serve to focus attention on certain aspects of an art organization's management or environment.

One researcher felt that a report of his study of museum labeling was almost completely ignored, but noted that a "number of the staff had never thought about the issues I was raising, and my comments seemed to open their eyes." In another museum study, both the museum director and the researcher felt the study had heightened sensitivity to visitor concerns. The researcher observed: "I think it has made a general difference in how people see things. There is not yet a radical enough effect.... But the idea of the questionnaire has been accepted. That goes on a lot now, whenever there is any controversy or question to be solved, people circulate questionnaires to get visitor opinions. The idea of feedback from visitors has become more important. Even going out on the floor and observing and talking to people has become more important. The basic change is the idea that you can't sit behind closed doors and predict visitor reaction, you have to go and find it out."

One of the most important applications of audience studies was not in solving problems but in finding them. Rational decision-making theory would suggest that organizations monitor their environments, note problems as they arise, and make decisions accordingly. Research is generally seen as a part of the decision process, undertaken to fill gaps in information needed to make rational judgments on existing or future programs. More often, however, research appeared to help organizations scan their environment, to define problem areas where at most only vague concerns existed.[3]

Museum visitor studies were particularly useful in this respect. Studies of visitors to several museums led to numerous, easily accomplished changes. Floors were renumbered, new signs posted, information desks installed. Several performing arts institutions found that audiences preferred different performance times and curtain times were changed. Surveys revealing audience social compostion sometimes led to greater publicity among overrepresented groups, at other times to publicity among underrepresented groups. In some cases, statistical findings were less influential than longhand comments elicited at the end of survey questionnaires. Critical assessments of the physical plant were described as particularly useful, since organizations could readily respond to many of the recommendations. The importance of the problem-signaling function of audience studies provides a clue to the lack of relationship between technical quality and utility. Information need not be precise to place an item on an organization's agenda.

Audience research, then, enters the policy process in a number of often unexpected and usually indirect ways. Its use is generally one of six types:

Problem-solving function. In a few cases, especially in the area of marketing, research is used to guide decisions on specific issues. Spending for promotion and pricing decisions are typical examples.

Problem-finding function. Frequently, research is used to monitor an organization's activities and environment. Identifying causes of visitor discontent is a common application.

Reinforcement function. Frequently, study findings are used to back up or legitimate preferences or decisions of arts managers. Reinforcing a decision to alter programming would be characteristic.

Attention-focusing function. Sometimes, even when the results are ignored, the research process itself focuses staff attention on some previously slighted issue. The importance of doing research at all may be established only by the completion of an initial research project.

Expressive function. Occasionally, audience studies are used to represent symbolically a commitment to such principles as the importance of marketing or an organization's responsibility to the public.

Lobbying function. In many cases, research findings are used in efforts to persuade government agencies or other institutions to provide financial assistance or otherwise support an arts institution.

Poor research can of course, lead to unsound policies, especially if it is applied automatically, in textbook fashion, to a decision. But we did not find this to be the case. Rather than helping managers make specific decisions, the audience studies we looked at usually served to reinforce opinions, persuade outsiders, or focus attention on some general problem area or set of goals. The contribution of research to the management appeared to be suggestive or symbolic rather than definitive, and research carried out poorly was as useful as research that was well-designed and executed by orthodox standards. Even in those few cases where research was brought to bear on relatively specific questions, managers often had so little information that they felt any input, however crude, reduced ambiguity and clarified alternatives. If poor policy resulted from poor quality research, it was not so noted by the management.

FACTORS PROMOTING RESEARCH UTILITY

The research directors and users we interviewed named a long list of factors that helped or hindered in applying research results. In general, studies had powerful effects in these situations: when their findings confirmed the suspicions of arts managers; when an influential person actively sought to use them; when the authority of outside researchers lent legitimacy to their findings; and when researchers were involved on a sustained basis in staff deliberations. Studies failed to make an impact in these cases: when there was high staff turnover; when organizations lacked the resources to use the findings; when influential individuals were hostile or indifferent to the research; when results were reported in a confusing manner; and when report contents were perceived as trivial or inconclusive.

Those factors which promoted use of the research can be grouped as three types: attributes of the study, features of the arts organization applying the results, and the political environment.

Study attributes

The most frequently mentioned of the three was study attributes. It was cited as contributing to research use in twelve of the twenty-five studies (Table 12). The single most important aspect here was whether the research findings fit with the preconceptions of the organization managers (mentioned in eight studies). Use was high when the research served to reinforce attitudes. One study director reported that the trustees of a performing arts festival were initially skeptical about his study because of the relatively small sample, but nonetheless accepted the findings because they were expected.

Another attribute of a study which enhanced its use was the authority of the outside researcher (cited in four studies). High authority was derived from affiliation with a prestigious university or reputable marketing or public-opinion firm. In a few instances individuals also benefitted from considerable reputations of their own. Authoritative directorship of the research ensured that technical challenges to the research findings would not be raised and in general provided an air of legitimacy to the research. Thus, one study aimed at local public officials gained credibility from the firm's long-standing track record: "There was no skepticism over the methods of the study. Most politicians were savvy about survey research, since they use it in polling all the time. And the people involved in the study, including myself, were already well known.... We were already highly visible people when we came in to do the study." In another instance, a museum administrator turned to a well-established marketing firm for a visitor study after a previous study had floundered from lack of credibility: "You have to have a professional prepare the study, both because only a professional, an outsider, can prepare unbiased questions, and only a professional knows the techniques for doing these kinds of studies. People working in museums will prepare biased questions and don't know how to conduct the study." Experienced outside researchers bring not only the needed technical skills but also the capacity to effectively interpret the results based on statistical procedures. One performing arts manager in a university town turned to the business school for assistance because "they have much more expertise in designing survey instruments (and) they could explain to me what a cross-tabulation is, how to understand a chi-square."

The third attribute was the presence of unexpected results. Surprise findings, while neither confirming nor refuting strong preconceptions, were important in a few instances because they drew attention to new problems (cited in two studies). One study designed to provide ammunition for a struggle over admission charges found that the museum had a preponderance of first-time visitors and drew from a broader public than had been believed. The surprising nature of these incidental findings led the museum to alter its scheduling. In a study of nonvisitors done by another museum, the surprise was that nonattenders were indifferent rather than hostile to museums. The unexpected lack of public antagonism had the effect of increasing managerial optimism about the value of broader marketing.

Table 12

Frequency of Factors Cited Affecting Use of Audience Research Results

Factor Affecting Use	Number of Studies for Which Factor Was Cited
Facilitating Factors	
Study attributes--total	12
Fit preconceptions	8
Authority of outside researchers	4
Surprising results	2
Organizational factors--total	11
Support of influential individuals	9
Researcher involved in staff deliberations	4
Small institution provided flexibility for inovation	3
Autonomy of department	1
External political factors--total	4
Politicians needed position legitimization	2
Interest groups needed results for lobbying	2
Inhibiting Factors	
Organizational factors--total	13
Staff turnover broke momentum	11
Lack of resources for implementation	7
Other problems preempted attention	3
Lack of interest or hostility	10
Low priority, uninterested	6
Researcher viewed as outsider	4
Hostility to public input	4
Planning	10
Lack of goals	5
No intention to use results	3
Unfortunate timing of research	2
Inhibiting Factors (Continued)	
Communication and dissemination--total	10
Results delivered without follow-through	6
Report confusing, too long	4
Researchers unavailable for follow-through as time passed	2
Report recipients lacking technical competence	2
Report did not reach right people	1
Conflict between researchers and administrators	1
Report never delivered	1
Report content--total	9
Findings obvious or trivial	4
No study of nonattenders	3
Organization interests changed during time of study	2
Findings outdated	2
Too few questions addressed	1
Lack of negative feedback	1
Study execution--total	8
Inadequate funds	6
Inadequate time	3
Lack of opportunity for managerial input	2
Technical features of study--total	3
Low response rate	2
Small sample	1
Lack of in-house expertise	1

Although in only two studies were unexpected results explicitly cited as a reason for the study's utility, other evidence suggests that the element of surprise may increase the likelihood that a study will be applied. In thirteen studies, the results were unexpected by the researchers and managers; in eleven studies they were not. All of the former studies had impact on some policy area, while four of the latter were deemed to have virtually no impact.

Personal commitment

The second major set of factors contributing to study utility had to do with certain features of the organization (identified as important in eleven studies). The most critical organizational aspect was the commitment of an administrator in the arts organization to the research (cited in nine studies). Without such a commitment, research was often ignored.[4] One administrator, who served as advocate for an in-house report told us: "The only way for these studies to get used is if someone is personally involved and committed to the data. You have to care enough to really push something or it just won't get used. This is true of just about everything in the museum world."

Another museum administrator explained his role in promoting application of a visitor study: "There is a mandate to implement the report at all levels. (The study director) has the license to roam around the place and complain whenever she sees something being done that goes against the findings of the study. She tries persuasion and happens to be very persuasive, and I stand behind her with a big stick."

Administrative backing of research use was especially critical in small institutions. One manager of a theatrical organization, asked if he faced difficulty in implementing the findings of an in-house study, put the matter succinctly: "No. By virtue of the fact that I was manager of the companies, I could do whatever I wanted to do."

In large institutions, even when key administrators favor use, bureaucratic conflicts and resistance can hamper implementation. In one case the relative autonomy of a research-oriented department was an aid to application. The marketing director explained: "The way the marketing department works, it's pretty self-contained in this area. We do the research and then we disseminate the information to the areas that would be involved in the relevant (nonmarketing) decisions." More typically, however, supportive managers faced considerable resistance. In several cases sympathetic head administrators disassociated themselves from research in order to avoid further polarizing divided institutions.

Since studies are rarely designed to provide immediate information for specific decisions, their use depends on familiarity and a cumulative process of acceptance and learning. This is most likely to occur if an in-house researcher is involved in staff deliberations on a day-to-day basis. One study director, for instance, repeatedly discussed data at staff meetings. For many months no final report was written: "I purposely didn't want to write a final report or have a final report floating around because that would have created closure on the project. I wanted people to feel that there was a data bank there to be used and possibly added to if there were more questions that needed answers." In another museum, the key administrator placed the office of the research director next to that of the director of education, to ensure they would frequently encounter one another in the halls.

External factors

The third set of considerations contributing to the use of audience studies involved external political factors (cited as important in four of the twenty-five cases). A receptive political climate significantly helped the use of study results. In two cases, local government officials wanted some further rationale for decisions they were already prepared to make. In one, for example, an economic impact study of performing arts institutions in a city was done as part of a public relations campaign to justify improved lighting and police protection in the theatre district. City leaders were sympathetic--an important city official had, in fact, been mugged in one institution's lobby--and welcomed a study with entirely predictable findings which bolstered their position. In two other cases, lobbying groups quickly capitalized on results useful to their campaigns. One study director described the use of his study: "The communication was largely personal. We talked to key people, particularly on the (lobbying) committee and they talked to the legislature. The financial people would talk to the politicians one by one. The research was never formally presented. The report was very limited in distribution, never presented as a main support, only drawn on when it was useful."

FACTORS PREVENTING RESEARCH UTILITY

While many studies were applied extensively, others were not. The list of inhibiting factors was a long one. It can be divided into the following areas: organizational factors; lack of interest, planning, communication, and follow-through; report content; study execution; and technical features of study (Table 12).

Staff turnover and lack of resources

The problem most frequently cited as preventing use had less to do with the studies themselves than with the organizations that commissioned them (identified as important for thirteen studies). Of all the organizational factors hampering implementation, staff turnover, endemic to arts organizations, was the prime culprit. The use of research, as we have seen, involves building and maintaining commitment, and arts institutions, perhaps because they are understaffed, seem to rely more on memory and less on memoranda than other organizations. Staff turnover poses serious problems for research use. In the case of studies of two performing arts organizations and one museum, administrators most involved with research projects left their institutions and, while the findings were useful to them in their new positions, the studies had no impact on the institutions for which they were designed. In the case of two other museum studies, the administrators who commissioned the research took jobs elsewhere, leaving study directors to face an indifferent or antagonistic staff. One museum went through several directors within three years of a study's conception. In two instances, the reluctance of caretaker staff to make major decisions during extensive search periods for new directors meant a reluctance to use the visitor studies.

Another problem was that organizations simply lacked resources to implement recommendations. One museum study was opposed by that institution's education department because, in the study director's words: "It was the attitude that we know what is right and good to do but we can't do it anyway because resources are scarce, so why spend money on this kind of research?" Several arts council administrators felt that studies they had sponsored were inadequately publicized due to lack of staff time. Less directly, low salary levels contributed to the departures of some staff members who might have been instrumental in using study results. But perhaps the most critical scarcity was that of funds to try new programs. A performing arts institution administrator explained: "One of the restraints on the implementation of new policy was that (the institution) is just so poor. It was clear that a broad advertising campaign should be developed to attract tourists, but (the institution) didn't have money or staff to do this. Our hands were tied." In several cases, management or financial crises intervened to the extent that research results were lost in the shuffle.

Hostility and lack of interest

A second set of factors involved indifference or hostility towards research on the part of staff and management (cited for ten studies). In some cases the research director was distrusted as an inexperienced outsider. One director of a visitor study was perceived, according to a sympathetic governing board member, as "an outsider brought in by the trustees. If the staff had their way, all outsiders would be dropped, even the outside auditors; they think they know all they need to know." Similarly, a museum director who had attempted to disseminate the findings of a study of his institution reported: "There are some senior people in the museum world who literally won't read the report, even in a very short version. I'm friendly with some of these people and they have frankly told me that it is useless and they won't look at it. If you want to remain on friendly terms you just have to laugh it off." Hostility to social science research also exists. One museum administrator told us: "I think audience studies are absolutely hopeless--they are a waste of time and the work force. We tried here to use the questionnaire-type for three different seasons. We would sit somebody down like a stooge to ask them questions, and we used observation, and it was ridiculous. They are no good for anything at all. I'm just predisposed against questionnaires, they're silly. I get ten a week across my desk. They are like macaroni and cheese, you can get it anywhere, and the only question is whose is better." Distrust of outsiders and of social science methods in general is not exclusive to museums. It was cited by persons involved in theatre and symphony audience research as well.

In some cases, particularly art museums, the staff doubted the relevance of public opinion. Administrators contended that a museum's responsibilities to the public have to be balanced against its duties in the area of scholarship. This position was a source of complaint by one researcher: "There are people in established positions who feel that it is entirely their prerogative to run the museum on the basis of connoisseurship and that the public's desires couldn't be less relevant. They are very sensitive to art-historical standards; connoisseurship is the religion of curators. They have had a lot of experience with people wanting circuses for the hoi polloi and they see that as very threatening to their positions. Even a few who are sympathetic are afraid." One museum official noted that some curators even refused to allow chairs or benches in their galleries after a visitor survey indicated a demand for seating to combat museum fatique because "they felt that tacky modern furniture would distract the visitors from the beauty of their....masterpieces."

The presence of such attitudes did not render all art museum studies useless by any means. For one thing, resistance to public input is not universal. Most institutions studied had several staff members or administrators sympathetic to research and the balance of opinion varied widely from place to place. A number of respondents reported that financial hardships were making museum administrators increasingly responsive to public desires. As an administrator explained, interest in planning is increasing as a result of two pressures: "The first is financial and all the rest can be tied back to this. Financial pressures are facing all cultural organizations. Donors and supporters are demanding a more businesslike approach; you are getting greater sophistication from everyone from trustees to staff.... Also the public is becoming more aware that the museum is a public institution. Pressure comes from the public to make services more readily available and indirect pressures are perceived by the trustees and others.... It comes in the form of pressures from people, verbal discussions, with articles, changes in priorities. Cultural institutions are becoming more important in people's lives, there is more concern with people's rights, maybe leisure is more important. It is not like the sixties when black groups applied pressure to museums by direct action; that is not going on now. But it's more like a groundswell--the impetus is internal, it comes from the trustees and management, but that is just a reflection of the present-day world."

Researchers and sponsors managed to create some enthusiasm for research--or at least tolerance of it--by avoiding questions threatening to particular staff members, by presenting findings without recommendations, and by including museum staff in research design through soliciting questions and feedback on study plans.

Perhaps more distressing to study directors than hostility was the frequent indifference to their work. One researcher who carried out a visitor study in a museum (after the director who hired him had left) complained: "Working in (the museum) was like working in a vacuum. Nobody cared. There were no obstacles, everybody was friendly and nominally cooperative, but they were very worried about the new exhibits and this was taking up their time and energy.... I have no way of knowing if any of the results were surprising, since the report was not read." A director of an in-house museum study complained, "If I hadn't followed through, the results would have been buried immediately. I had to work hard to get people to even read their report." While such lack of interest seemed particularly characteristic of museum adminstrations, it was by no means restricted to them. The director of a performing arts audience study said: "I don't know exactly what use was made of the research.... The report was sent to the (membership group) but I never got any feedback from the board. I also gave it to (administrators and board members) and said I would like to talk to them about it, and that was the last I ever heard from them. I don't even know if they have ever read the whole report." A performing arts organization staff member committed to audience research resigned when he called a meeting to present the findings of a study he had commissioned and only one person came. The director of another performing arts study was actually unable to find someone in the arts organization, which had undergone extensive staff turnover, willing to receive the report.

82

Research Planning

A third set of factors detracting from study use is related to planning (cited for ten studies). Several researchers and users complained about the absence of clear research goals. A university-based director of a performing arts audience study commented that one "factor in explaining its lack of utility is that (the study) was not aimed at any specific problem." Similarly, a museum official, discussing a visitor study in effect "donated" to his institution, said, "There was a problem in fixing the objectives of the study. (The study director) wanted us to state our objectives, but we found this difficult to do. The questions he finally worked out seemed trivial to us." An academic investigator who directed a cross-sectional study for a local arts council noted: "There was a fair amount of interest in doing a survey. The problem was a lack of understanding of what a survey could do, a lack of proper expectations--and this was probably our fault, because it's important in market research to establish this first. People didn't really know what to expect--they thought it was a good idea to do a survey and find out something about the audience, but they have no clear idea about what to use the results for." In a few cases, studies were planned for internal political reasons rather than for the use of results. As mentioned previously, some studies were performed to placate membership committees, and one study was reportedly undertaken because of a personal friendship between an administrator and a member of the research firm involved. Finally, two studies suffered from bad timing, unavoidable because of the availability of funds or personnel. A performing arts institution was surveyed (as part of a larger effort) just before moving into a permanent facility, rendering some of the data irrelevant. The presence of major construction and its attendant problems complicated the administration of one museum study, pushing staff energies to the limit and, those involved speculated, inflating the number of respondents who expressed disappointment in their visits.

Communication and follow-through

Difficulties in communicating and disseminating the study information made up a fourth set of factors which diminished research use (reported to be significant in ten studies). Several study reports were considered too long or confusing by both their authors and recipients (in only one case was a report not prepared). One university-affiliated researcher said: "The analyses were done by a graduate student working under me.... The student wrote a long report that was really not that well written, and then he and a couple of people at (the arts council sponsoring the research) sent out a pamphlet.... For market research to be really effective, it has to be presented to small groups who have the opportunity to ask questions and really go over the thing. I sort of have the feeling that that never happened in this case." The director of another arts council that had commissioned an audience study felt that the findings would have been more powerful if the report had been condensed, with fewer statistics. A museum administrator who received one rather technical report of a visitor study confessed that, although he was interested in research and carried the results around for a while, he found the report so boring that he never read it. Two study directors complained about lack of sophistication in their readers. "It was apparent that most people (in the museum) didn't have any appreciation for social science research, of the most basic elements of experimental procedures," observed one researcher. In general, however, researchers with specialized training appeared willing and able to write their reports for an audience of intelligent laypersons.

The key communication problems had to do with an absence of follow-through once the final report was delivered. In each of the three cases in which an arts council or umbrella group sponsored research on a local cross section or set of audiences, inadequate communication with member arts organizations was identified as a critical defect of the research policy process. One in-house study director recommended that such studies be seen as two-stage endeavors, the first involving research, the second consisting of workshops and informal communications with specific arts institutions. Another felt that, while a one-day workshop helped to make member institutions more conscious of research, further efforts would have been valuable. In a third case, the director of a performing arts organization whose audience was surveyed as part of a larger effort complained: "Quite frankly, I have yet to have (the study) on my desk. I looked at it briefly in (the study director's) office, but it was such a cumbersome thing.... We are absolutely not influenced by it because we have no knowledge at all of what the data did show. That's an important point: make sure that the cooperating institutions get to see the results. That seems simple." This was not a case of malicious neglect. In fact, the study director, who headed a local umbrella arts group, urged us to speak to this arts administrator as someone who had used the report's findings to good effect. Yet the arts administrator had not been given a copy of the study--"I've asked for the results about four or five times and I'm not going to ask anymore, I have other things to do"--and was quite indignant.[5]

Lack of follow-through was also cited by one study director and one research user as a danger inherent in the use of student labor. A performing arts manager said of a study undertaken with the help of a business school student: "I have a strong sense that there was other data we had not dragged out, that there was more there than we were able to make use of. The hazard of using a student is that once her second year got underway, like us, she got busier and busier and less able to work with us--that was a liability. If we do it again and cannot afford to hire a professional group who will do it in an elaborate fashion, if we do use students again, I am pretty sure that we will assign it to someone and make it part of a course load for a full year, not simply a means of summer support." Our interviews, as well as the experience of many studies not considered here, indicate that graduate students and, in some cases undergraduates, represent an important resource to organizations that cannot afford to hire professionals. But when student labor is used it is essential to make sure that students have sufficient expertise, that they receive adequate supervision, that they will hold themselves accountable for high-quality work, and that they will be available to participate in follow-through research, interpretation, or dissemination.[6]

Report content

A fifth difficulty had to do with the content of the reports themselves (identified as important for nine studies). In two cases findings were perceived as outdated due to changes in the audience. In two other instances, research users stated that results were inconclusive or obvious, in another case that results were unexpected but of trivial importance, and in yet another that findings were "not dramatic" enough to make a difference. To some extent, these responses reflect initial hostility to research or, conversely, inflated hopes.

In several other cases the report's content was unsatisfactory for relatively specific reasons. In the case of one multi-institutional analysis, by the time the report was delivered the sponsoring art council changed its interest to studies tailored to the needs of specific member institutions. (The study had already served its primary purpose of publicizing the council before its findings were available.) In another case, a museum abandoned a major planning effort, and the visitor study conducted in conjunction with that effort was not immediately usable. Users of three studies, one of several performing arts events and two of museums, regretted that the studies they had sponsored were not of wider scope. They were interested in the characteristics and attitudes of nonattenders, who had been left out of the study, as well as of those who used their institutions. To some extent, this may have reflected the fact that as managers become involved in the research process, their questions grow more sophisticated and become better defined. Finally, in-house directors of two museum studies regretted the relative paucity of negative evaluation from visitors, since specific critism was considered particularly useful to management.

Study execution

Study execution (cited for eight studies) was also a factor in study utility. Directors or users of four studies said that study funding was inadequate. One art council staff member felt a stronger study could have been conducted had money been available to survey nonattenders. An in-house museum researcher reported that his survey had not been fully used in part due to the absence of funds for computerized data analysis. Another study director, who had volunteered his services, acknowledged that his commitment to the project was undermined by the lack of compensation: "I was too busy to pay much attention to (the data analysis) and I was involved in a number of other projects. Frankly, if I had been paid it would have been different." Two study directors regarded the level of expenditure on audience studies as an important index of an institution's commitment to the research process, which affected the inclination of the institution to use the results. An in-house study director for a performing arts festival observed that "if the project had been given more money (by the board) the study would have had more impact because the trustees would have expected more from it." Similarly, an outside director of a study of a major performing arts institution, with much experience in market research, reported: "The study was viewed as cheap by (the institution), which had the effect of lowering the commitment as well. When organizations are not paying for the product, they are less committed to using it." In general, however, few of the directors or managers interviewed felt that more money would have noticeably improved their studies or made their use more frequent. As we showed in the previous chapter, funding was the major determinant of audience study technical quality, but had no impact on utility.

Two of the arts managers stated that research on their audiences had little impact because they lacked an opportunity to affect the study's design. In most cases, however, both in-house and outside study directors reported soliciting user involvement in the design of the study. Usually, outside researchers consulted closely with key administrators, and in-house research advocates tried to draw as many staff and administrators as possible into survey planning. As one researcher put it, such consultation was necessary "to establish a political environment in which I could proceed."

Technical quality

In contrast to the extensive attention given such matters as organizational problems, administrative and staff attitudes, communication and dissemination, and planning, references to technical quality were almost entirely missing from our interviews. Low quality was mentioned as a problem in only three of the twenty-five studies. What is more, references to such factors as sample size, low response rate, and lack of in-house research expertise in these three instances involved casual, offhand observations. Although the studies varied widely in quality and many were poor by conventional social research standards, in no case was low technical quality cited as a major reason for disuse. In fact, all three who mentioned defects in technical quality were among those who found their studies useful for specific managerial decisions. Furthermore, in cases of those reporting the greatest amount of hostility or indifference to research, no objections were based on methodology. As one study director put it: "I was anxious to be challenged on the methodological quality of the work. Whenever someone said something slighting in a staff meeting, I would call him on it, but they invariably withdrew."

If hostility towards research findings was never expressed on methodological grounds, neither were such deficiencies much cause for distress when they were noted. An in-house researcher referred to a first study as "stabbing in the dark," "a first feeble attempt at research," and stated that he was currently working with university researchers to develop a more sophisticated program. Nonetheless, he used the earlier study to suggest marketing changes that were implemented. He believed only those results that were very strongly reported and that he himself found plausible. In another case, a board of trustees overlooked the small sample surveyed in a performing arts audience study because "the findings pretty much were expected."

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The willingness of arts managers to accept findings of research that does not meet regular technical standards is in large part a rational response to the environment in which their organizations function. Most art organizations have little time, money, or experience and could not strive to undertake high quality research even if they wanted to. Also, most have had virtually no systematic information about the composition, attitudes, or habits of their audiences. Any increment in knowledge can be valuable. And finally, lack of concern with technical quality reflects a recognition of the way in which research findings actually enter into the decision process in arts organizations--as marginal, indirect, reinforcing, suggestive, expressive, or symbolic inputs that depend little on the precise technical methods employed.

Seen in this way, the absence of a correlation between study technical quality and study utility is neither mysterious nor cause for great dismay. Nonetheless, if poor research is useful, good research can be even more useful, especially if it is applied in a rational manner to specific policy problems. We think such use of good research can become typical, and we offer the following recommendations.

First, arts managers have to be committed to using high quality audience research as a regular part of policy deliberations and planning. This depends, in turn, on their receiving the resources necessary for systematic planning and it means reaching some concensus as to the role audience information should play in arts planning. Second, an information infrastructure must be created in which both basic and applied research is conducted and widely disseminated throughout the art world. Until arts managers can easily draw on a pool of information and cumulative knowledge about the nature and habit of American arts consumers, each will continue to reinvent the wheel. Because of high staff turnover a professional research memory must serve in place of many transient individual ones. Third, an arrangement must be made that will permit those arts organizations unable to afford their own high quality research to get the information they need. Local arts research consortia, much like cooperative fund-raising drives for the arts, should be established and their limits and possibilities tested. Finally, as part of this effort, managers must increase their acquaintance with social research methods through short tutorials or other means. The services of individuals literate in research methods should be made available to institutions that are without access to them.

Certainly, there is some cause for optimism. Our formal interviews and informal conversations convince us that budget pressures along with a general change in attitude mean that planning and research in arts management is increasingly important. The research activities of the National Endowment for the Arts and other agencies may in time provide the infrastructure needed to minimize redundant research and reduce the cloud of uncertainty under which arts managers operate. And the development of programs in arts administration and the appeal of arts management to individuals with other kinds of business and social science training promises to raise the level of technical knowledge upon which arts organizations can profitably draw. There is, then, reason to believe that if a study similar to this one is carried out in ten years, its findings with regard to research quality and use will be different.

NOTES

1. Only post-1973 studies were included to ensure that respondent recollections were relatively fresh; the regional restriction was imposed to minimize data collection costs. However, the time restriction resulted in the exclusion of all examples of several major types of studies, and the geographic restriction was therefore relaxed to include five midwestern studies so that all types of audience studies were represented among our interviews.

2. The idea of research as discourse is developed by Cohen and Garet (1975) in an essay on social science research and federal educational policy.

3. For a discussion of the contribution of research to problem-setting at the federal level, see Rein and White (1977).

4. On the importance of leadership in the utility of federal health program evaluations, see Patton et al. (1977).

5. Although cooperative audience research efforts hold the promise of rigourous and comparable studies for organizations that lack the time or expertise to undertake them alone, their potential has yet to be realized. One reason is that such studies are usually carried out for broadly political purposes. Also, local councils or other consortium organizations lack the staff and resources to provide an adequate account of research findings and to help member organizations make use of them.

6. On the positive value of research alliances with university faculty and students, see Wainwright (1973).

CHAPTER 4

AN AGENDA FOR ARTS AUDIENCE RESEARCH

Perhaps the first priority for audience research should be the routine gathering of descriptive statistics about the audience over time. Such statistics could be gathered through a regular national survey of audiences for a stratified random sample of arts institutions. Thus far, the population of arts institutions has not been fully specified. However, improvements may make systematic sampling possible in the near future. The Census of Business, which had already included data on performing arts institutions, in 1977 added data on museums for the first time; and an economic data series is under consideration by the National Endowment for the Arts. Institutions included in the survey should be stratified by such variables as art type, region, degree of urbanization, programming policy, amateur versus professional status, and ticket price. Community-based and predominantly minority institutions, as well as free and outdoor events, should be included.

Studies performed by individual institutions must be designed locally to address the specific needs of the organizations sponsoring them. But questions can be written so as to make a survey comparable to previous research. The benefits are mutual: others will be able to use the results and those who undertake the survey will be able to contrast their own audiences with existing baseline data. In general, demographic categories can be patterned after census categorization schemes, with additional categories added as needed. When conventional categorization schemes are not used, then the use of many categories for such variables as education and occupation is preferable since it is often possible to merge response groups for purposes of comparison.

In sampling audience members, it is important to stress that forms should be completed by those who actually receive them, and not other members of their party or family. Such a practice, for example, would minimize any biasing effects of tendencies for older men (or women) to take on the task of completing questionnaires for other family members. Questions on educational attainment should differentiate between high school and non-high school graduates, between individuals with some college, graduates of two-year colleges, graduates of four-year colleges, and those with graduate training or degrees. Occupational categories are difficult at best. The use of standard census categories in pre-coded questionnaires, or requests for precise occupational descriptions to be coded by investigators with reference to census listings, would minimize confusion in this area. Researchers may also reduce response error by specifying that the respondent be currently employed at least one-half time in the occupation reported. Where income information is requested, family income should be specified. Where racial or ethnic information is requested, categories should be made specific and clear. The category "nonwhite," for example, may invite ambiguous responses and miss important differences.

Local organizations can also greatly increase the information gained from surveys by making use of cross-tabulations--that is, joint frequency distributions in which audience members are placed in cells formed by cross-classifying two or more variables. Cross-tabulations require little statistical training, only marginal added effort, and answer a wide range of managerial and other questions. For example, if one wants to see if those audience members reporting lower educational attainment are primarily young people continuing their education, one can do a cross-tabulation of age and education. If one wants to assess an audience's occupational level independent of gender, one can cross-tabulate gender and occupation. A manager who wishes to predict the effect on audience composition of an across the board increase in ticket prices can gain some insight by cross-tabulating ticket price and education (or occupation or income) and comparing those in the most expensive seats to those in the least expensive. A marketing specialist aiming at a particular income group can cross-tabulate income and source of information to see if different kinds of advertising reaches different kinds of visitors or attenders.

In addition to using cross-tabulations, researchers can inexpensively increase the information yielded by surveys in two other ways: demographic frequencies can be compared to census frequencies for metropolitan residents as a whole; and visits and visitors can be distinguished by asking respondents to note how many times they have attended an institution over a suitable time period (such as the previous twelve months).

Local organizations should be urged to publicize their own research findings and to make them available to other arts organizations. In general, arts institutions do not appear to be competing for the same dollars. Individuals who frequently attend one art form or institution seem frequently to attend others as well. Promotional energies may more profitably go towards expanding the total arts market for an area than towards dividing up the existing public. At any rate, audience studies rarely contain enough surprising, embarrassing, or definitive information to give an institution a competitive edge. Although we offered to maintain audience studies collected for this study on a confidential basis, we had few requests to do so, and such requests were almost always related to a specific and unusual institutional consideration. In most cases, then, those who undertake studies seem willing to disseminate their results. What is needed is a clearinghouse for such research in which organizations can share information to their mutual benefit.

In addition to the need for comparable descriptive data on audiences over time, other critical questions about arts audiences require more focused studies. Many of the arts managers we spoke with wanted information about nonattenders, the people whom direct audience surveys can never reach (though cross-sectional studies, of course, do so). Do individuals fail to attend museums and the performing arts because of lack of interest, antipathy, inconvenience, or prices? Such information is critical to attempts to enlarge the market for the arts and to meet the public's desire for greater accessibility to the arts. To understand nonattendance, in-depth interviews may be necessary to get beyond initial responses to questionnaires and to reach deeper motivations. Depending upon the targets of a market development plan, such studies could be focused on individuals demographically similar to attenders (for example, their next-door neighbors) or on individuals from socioeconomic groups with low attendance rates.

Research on the relationship of attendance at one art form to attendance at others indicates that, with the possible exception of theatregoers, aficionados of one art form also attend others. Such research, however, is at a rudimentary stage. Is there one arts audience or many? Do conditions vary from city to city with, say major arts centers like New York having multiple publics and smaller cities having a single cultural public? Furthermore, what is the responsiveness of arts attendance not only to price but also to content? If the opera raises its ticket prices or alters its programming, will audiences go to the theatre? Will they stay home and watch television? If an art museum changes its exhibits policies or raises its admission fee, will visitors go to science museums or to the aquarium or to a football game instead? It has been observed that television viewers watch television rather than tuning in specific programs. Is the situation similar in the arts? To what extent can institutions use program changes to draw larger or new audiences, or to experiment with new offerings without fear of losing the existing audience? We know little about the answers to these questions.

Many people in the arts have stressed a need to expand audiences to include those not already reached. The audiences analyzed in this study tended to share such characteristics as high educational attainment, high incomes, large percentages of professionals, and small percentages of blue-collar workers and minorities. Yet there were some striking exceptions. Intensive analysis of institutions that draw on unusually wide audiences may provide insights that other organizations can use.

An often useful but neglected methodology is the quasi-experimental design. If an institution is contemplating some change in admission price, time of performance, or other program policy and wants to assess its effect on audience composition, controlled studies of audiences before and after limited changes can be of great value. In such research it is important to consider alternative explanations for any change found. If this is done, pretest/post-test studies can be a powerful management tool.

Another issue about which little is known and much curiosity exists is the process of socialization into arts attendance: how early does it begin, how important is the family, and how important is the school? One easy way to begin to assess the importance of family background is to ask respondents questions about their parents. We know nothing about the relationship between the educational attainment or occupation of the parents and a person's attendance. If the habit is acquired early in life, family background may be almost as important as one's own education or occupation.

A more thorough examination of socialization into the arts must go beyond surveys to more focused interviews and studies of children and teenagers. We know that a person's educational attainment is the best predictor of his or her attendance at museums and performing arts events. But why is this so? Is it because people who stay in school a long time come from families where the arts are cultivated from an early age? Is it because formal training in the arts in high schools and colleges creates an appetite? Is it because colleges provide students with a culturally oriented peer group and large quantities of free time? Or is it some combination of these and other factors?

If there are many serious gaps in our knowledge about the public for museums and for the live performing arts, we know even less about the public for the arts in other forms. How many people enjoy theatre, dance, opera, and classical music on television and radio? Are these the same people who attend live performances or is it an entirely different group? Do media presentations serve as a substitute for live performances and exhibits, or do they only whet consumers' appetites? (The interested reader should consult Arts and Cultural Programs on Radio and Television by Natan Katzman and Kenneth Wirt (1977).) What about art books and phonograph records? Are such mechanical reproductions a supplement to or substitute for visits to art museums and nights at the opera? Until we learn more about those who consume the arts in their media forms, we can only speculate about the size and breadth of the arts audience as a whole.

The kind of research to be conducted and the extent of research carried out is ultimately a matter to be decided on the basis of values and priorities. For example, while research has usually revealed that the arts attenders are wealthier, better educated, and employed in more prestigious occupations than the public at large, audience research cannot indicate whether this situation is good, bad, or indifferent. Some institutions are committed to broadening the social composition of the audience, and it seems clear that such efforts can bear fruit. Among the studies we assembled were a few of audiences containing quite diverse cross-sections of the American public. And in the midst of the Depression, audiences for the Federal Theater Project included many employed blue-collar workers. Other institutions have found it easier, and financially critical, to develop further those segments of the public already attending. Different priorities for expansion dictate differing research designs. Such priorities must be made explicit in order to make the best use of research.

Especially at the local level, research is part of a process of planning and administration; and planning is something relatively new to the arts, about which there is some disagreement. Planning and research both cost money. The best development and use of arts audience research will require money for a research infrastructure, money for staff time to execute and follow through the implications of research, and money to permit institutions now living from crisis to crisis to become involved in long-range planning. Arts institutions have some capacity to improve research by shifting their own priorities. But, ultimately, systematic use of research on a wide scale, after the fashion of many government agencies and private industry, may be prohibitively expensive. The level of resources allocated to the arts from among competing national priorities is, of course, a product of the political process, and the constraints of this process will, indirectly critically shape the role that such research can play.

APPENDIX I

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APPENDIX II

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Rural communites in Wisconsin